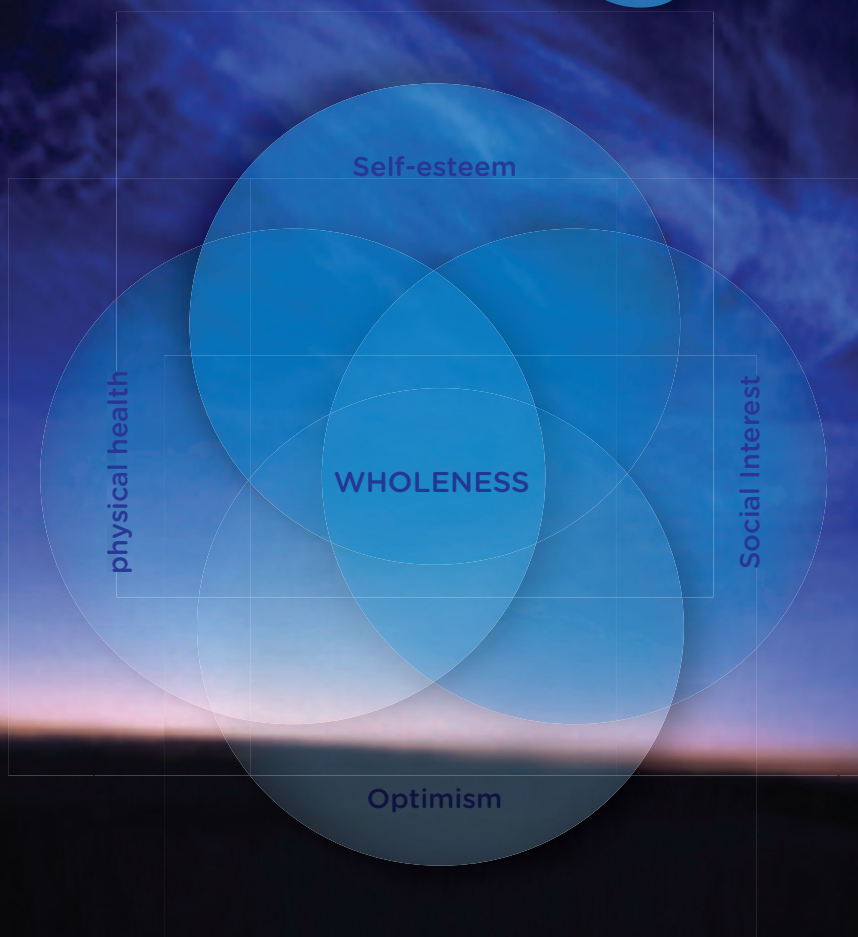


Wholeness Living



Bonaventura M. Balige

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Wholeness Living

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Preface

This book is the product of my thinking about why and how we get into psychological turmoil and how to get out. The title of the book, *Wholeness Living* stresses my conviction that we have some power in shaping the type of persons we become, if we attend to the four ways of being: the physical, the psychological, the social and the spiritual. Note, I say *some power* because I recognize the influence of the environment and heredity. There are circumstances in our life that we don't have control of, but the stance we choose to take with respect to these circumstances is in our power. From experience, for example, we know that not all genetically disadvantaged individuals grow up to become disadvantaged. Some succeed in overcoming their shortcomings. It is my conviction that whether I want to become miserable or happy will very much depend on me, that is, whether I lead a whole life (practice the four ways of being) or not.

My own experience in working with people has made me conclude that physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism are essential for our well-being, and they make up the main content of this book. Self-esteem is a measure of competence. As a person perceives himself or herself as competent in dealing with life's challenges, he or she becomes psychologically healthy. Social interest involves cooperation, responsibility, belonging and empathy. We become psychologically healthy as we join others in life affairs. Optimism brings a positive outlook and hope about the future. In other words, we become what we picture in our mind.

I have proposed in this book that we need to be aware of the power that exists within us, in others, and in the Higher Power. When these powers are in harmony within us, they promote growth that make us feel alive. This aliveness brings vitality that makes us feel all is well, no matter what happens in our life and in the lives of those we love. It is in this sense that I consider physical health, self-esteem, social interest, and optimism to be components of wholeness living. Wholeness emerges from the combination of physical health, high self-esteem, high social interest, and high optimism. Thus, wholeness living is the openness to the truth about the relationship with a physical self, a psychological self, others, and the Higher Power. We are yearning for this truth.

In my clinical practice, clients always raise questions about themselves, others, and God. I advocate that wholeness living be emphasized when offering mental health services. When people seek mental health help, most of them are searching for the meaning of life for themselves and for those around them. I view psychotherapy as a way of restoring the

person's wholeness by instilling its components, namely, physical health, self-esteem, social interest, and optimism.

This book is for those who wake up every morning frightened about everything, and wondering whether they will make it until evening without breaking up. I want to say to them that the good news is, we all have a power to create wholeness that can see us through any storms of life. I dared to write this book because I strongly believe that the best way to heal myself is to reach out to others; the more we give, the more we receive.

Thank you for allowing me to share my ideas with you, and may these ideas provide for you the growth that I am dreaming of as I am sharing them with you. I want you to grow and become the individual you were meant to be - that is my dream for you.

By Bonaventura Mutayoba Balige, Psy.D.,

July 2010

INTRODUCTION

A wife was expecting a birthday gift from her husband. For many months she had admired a beautiful diamond ring in a showroom, and knowing her husband could afford it, told him that was all she wanted for her birthday. As her birthday approached, the wife looked for signs that her husband had purchased the diamond ring. Finally, on the morning of her birthday, her husband called her into his study room. He told her how proud he was to have such a good wife, and how much he loved her. He handed her a beautifully wrapped gift box. Curious and expectant, the wife opened the box and found a lovely, leather-bound Bible, with her name embossed in gold on it. Angrily, she raised her voice to her husband and said, "With all your money you have, you only give me a Bible?" She stormed out of the house, leaving her husband for good.

Many years passed and she became a successful business woman. She managed to remarry, get a more beautiful house and a wonderful family. One day she thought about her ex-husband who was by then very old and thought perhaps she should go visit him. But before she could make arrangements, she received a telegram telling her that he had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to her. She needed to go back immediately and take care of things. When she arrived at her ex-husband's house, sudden sadness and regret filled her heart. She began to search through her ex-husband's important papers and saw her birthday present; the Bible was still new as she had left it many years back. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. Her ex-husband had carefully underlined a verse, Matthew 7:11, "And if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father, who is in heaven, give what is good to those who ask Him?"

As she read the words, a tiny package dropped from the back of the Bible. Inside the package was a diamond ring. Her name was engraved on it; the same diamond ring she had seen many years back at the showroom. On the tag was the date of her birth, and the words. "LUV U ALWAYS."

How many times do we miss God's blessings because they are not packaged as we expected?

I trust you enjoyed this story. Pass it on to others. Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you have now was once among the things you only hoped for. ***IF YOUR GIFT IS NOT PACKAGED THE WAY YOU WANT IT TO BE, IT IS BECAUSE IT IS BETTER PACKAGED THE WAY IT HAS BEEN PACKAGED. ALWAYS APPRECIATE LITTLE THINGS; THEY USUALLY LEAD TO BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS.***

‘The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They are felt with the heart.’

I received these words from a friend via an email message. She did not mention the author of the message. The instruction was “Pass it on to others.” Well, I decided to “pass it” on to you, reader, not only this message, but other messages you will find in this book.

This Book is my Gift to you

Many people think emotions are magical – they just fall like raindrops or rise from the depths of people’s souls. These folks disclaim responsibility for their feelings – “the devil made me do it!” Many sincerely believe other people or life situations cause them to feel a certain way. Actually, people have more control over their emotions than they realize – McKay & Dinkmeyer¹

What really brings healing to individuals suffering from mental health problems? I have witnessed clients who move from one institution to another; from therapist to therapist, seeking a “cure” for their mental health problems, but, somehow, without getting better. During a session, one of my clients asked me whether she would ever be “normal.” Our main challenge as psychotherapists is to create an atmosphere that enables significant healing to take place in those who seek our services.

Wholeness implies totality that constitutes the entirety of a person. Most of us live half lives in that we don’t attend to all four ways of being, and so lead incomplete lives.

Wholeness Living: As a psychologist, I always ask myself, what makes people grow and become healthy. How, as a psychologist and counsellor, can I help people towards this direction? Through deep reflection, I concluded that there are four things that people need in order to

¹ McKay & Dinkmeyer

become whole. These are: physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism. As a result, my main objective when working with clients is to promote physical health, self-esteem, social interest, and optimism.

The title of this book is *Wholeness Living*, a notion that forms the main content of this book. “Wholeness” implies totality that constitutes the entirety of a person. It will be argued throughout this book that any helping relationship should aim at promoting growth for the totality of the person. This encompasses the physical, the psychological, the social and the spiritual dimensions of the individual (a physio-psycho-socio-spiritual approach). Given the complex nature of human beings, real growth is promoted through the following four ways of being:

1. The physical way of being - body and environment
2. The psychological way of being - mind
3. The social way of being - society
4. The spiritual way of being - spirit

The aim of this book is to emphasize the complexity of human nature. The four ways of being make one complete without which, a human being is said to be incomplete. This idea is not new. There is plenty of literature on the subject. The aim of this book is just to emphasize its importance on human life. Most of us live half-lives in that we don't attend to all four ways of being, and so lead incomplete lives.

If we respect ourselves, explore and put to use all the talents that God has given us, it will be the most honourable way of praising and honouring God.

Measurements: Physical health is a measure of the physical way of being while self-esteem is a measure of the psychological way of being. Social interest is the measure of the social way of being and optimism is the measure of the spiritual way of being. Therefore, this book is an introduction to the physio-psycho-socio-spiritual approach to human wholeness. Any human growth should take into consideration the four aspects. It is my belief that in promoting wholeness, self-esteem should be given more emphasis. I believe that self-esteem is most fundamental to living. Branden (1994) maintains that low self-esteem is a common denominator in all mental health disorders. He writes,

When I began the practice of psychotherapy, I became convinced that low self-esteem was a common denominator in all the varieties of personal

distress I encountered in my practice. I saw low self-esteem as a predisposing causal factor of psychological problems and also a consequence. The relationship was reciprocal. Sometimes problems could be understood as direct expressions of an underdeveloped self-esteem – for example, shyness, timidity, and fear of self-assertion or intimacy (p.156).²

Branden's work motivated me to read further about self-esteem. Based on her clinical experience, Sorensen (1998, p.4) concluded that the disabling state of low self-esteem is at the heart of many psychological problems.³ I consider social interest and optimism as other faces of self-esteem, because high self-esteem in isolation; without hope or meaning in life is false. We grow as human beings through engaging with others in different areas of life, and by hoping that all shall be well. Self-esteem and social interest will be incomplete if an individual is not optimistic. Hale, *et al* (1992, p.313) observed that individuals with a high expectation for success (optimism) report a higher level of self-esteem.⁴

In addition, for any therapy to bring about the desired healing, it should aim at raising the individual's four levels of relationships. These are:

1. The relationship with the physical self - body, environment (physical health)
2. The relationship with the psychological self - mind (self-esteem)
3. The relationship with the social self - society - (social interest)
4. The relationship with the spiritual self - image of the Higher Power in us - (optimism)

Therefore, physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism are measures of wholeness. St Paul also stated the same thing. He said there are three things that are important: faith (self-esteem, physical health), love (social interest) and hope (optimism) My interpretation of St. Paul's faith, love, and hope follows.

We need to have faith in ourselves, that is, to be aware of the tremendous power that exists within us. This is the power that the Master (Jesus) calls, "The Kingdom of God is within you." This means that having faith in oneself is having faith in God. If we respect ourselves, explore and put to use all the talents that God has given to us, it will be the most honourable way of praising and honouring God. As one of the Doctors of the Church puts it, "The glory of God is man or woman fully alive."

² Branden, (1994)

³ Sorensen (1998)

⁴ Hale, *et al* (1992)

This is what I believe is meant by “relationship with oneself - physical or psychological,” and it is measured by physical health and self-esteem, respectively.

Love can be defined as the force in us that moves us toward others. We cannot grow alone. As we cooperate with others, have empathy for others, and have a sense of belonging, we grow and recreate ourselves. This is what is meant by “relationship with others (Social self),” and it is measured by social interest.

Hope can be seen as the awareness in us that makes us say, “We will make it.” Hope keeps us alive because we sense that all shall be well; no matter what happens. All shall be well because if we obey natural laws and trust in the Higher Power, all shall be well. This is what is meant by “relationship with the Higher Power (spiritual self),” and it is measured by “optimism.”

The person who has faith in him or herself, the person who reaches out to others to give and receive and the person who is hopeful is a whole person. In other words, only a person with sound self-esteem, physical health (faith), with high social interest (love) and with optimism (hope) can truly claim to be mature.

Hopefully, this book will bring awareness to the reader to recognize that without high social interest, sound self-esteem and optimism, it may be hard to find meaning in life. As Dr Victor Frankl (1984, p.85) puts it, “Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying it out.”⁵ Therefore, those in the helping professions such as therapists, psychologists, social workers and religious leaders must ask themselves what can be done to raise the level of physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism in their lives and in the lives of those they serve.

The Power of the Mind Creating Heaven or Hell.. We can't eliminate all suffering and pain, but by practicing wholeness living, we can bring a lot of meaning in our lives that will turn any suffering and pain into occasion for growth.

Creating Heaven: In my work as a psychologist, I explore the human mind, and it is clear to me that we can use our mind to create a “hell” or a “heaven” for us – it all depends on us (McKay & Dinkmeyer, 1994). A lot depends on how we perceive and interpret life. But what do we mean by “Heaven”? Christians believe heaven is a place where God is,

⁵ Dr Frankl, V (1984)

and when people die their souls go there. They believe that in heaven there is no pain or suffering and no tears. It is all happiness. My belief, as clarified in this book, is that we can start our heaven here on earth by creating circumstances that lead to wholeness living. Of course we can't eliminate all suffering and pain, but by practicing wholeness living, we can bring a lot of meaning in our lives that will turn any suffering and pain into occasion for growth.

The first time I knew that I would be involved in a helping profession was when I began thinking about my future, and I saw my life as inadequate. A few months before the end of my theology studies, after being ordained a deacon, I started thinking about what I was going to do as my main profession in life. I knew one day I was going to be an ordained priest, and that scared me. As a priest, I figured that I would be dealing with people. This meant that I would be a public figure, one role that I dreaded most. This book is also about my own struggle to become the person I was meant to be. I am aware of the world behind me that has shaped the perception I have today which sometimes makes me wonder whether there has been something wrong with me. It is about discovering that the Kingdom is within us all.

I chose psychology not so much to learn how to help others, but mainly because I wanted to help myself become an effective priest. I was tired of going through life fearing a "monster" I couldn't name. During my studies, fellow students told me similar experiences. Many, like me, entered the field of psychology because of personal issues that they wanted to resolve. It was at that time I was aware that God was calling me to use my personal experience to reach out to others in need of psychological help.

I have been working with clients with diverse problems, from all walks of life. I feel privileged to be entrusted with people's intimate stories; stories that in many ways have made me grow. Most of these stories are about terrible incidents that have been bothering clients and led them to seek psychological help. As I compare my life story to theirs, I feel God has blessed me with so much. In fact, I feel God has given me everything and He wants me to share my gifts with others. I feel I will be more fulfilled if I spend the rest of my life giving everything I have in helping those suffering from mental stress. I believe that the best way to heal myself is to reach out to others who are hurting; and that the more we give, the more we receive.

This book is also the product of my thinking about why and how we get into psychological turmoil and how to get out. The title of the book, *Wholeness Living*, emphasizes my conviction that we have some power in shaping the type of persons we become. Note, I say *some power* because

I recognize the influence of the environment and heredity. There are circumstances in our life that we don't have control over, but the stance we choose to take with respect to these circumstances is in our power. For example, we know that not all genetically disadvantaged individuals grow up to become disadvantaged. Some succeed in overcoming their deficits.

My own experience in working with people has made me conclude that physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism are essential in our psychological health. The analysis of these makes up the content of this book. Part I defines and describes physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism. Branden (1994), Adlerians (followers of psychologist, Alfred Adler) and Nouwen (1975) have been used for the meaning of self-esteem, social interest and optimism, respectively.

Part II is the synthesis of how physical health, self-esteem, social interest and optimism are related and how they can be fostered. My argument is that optimism (spirituality) is the foundation of self-esteem and social interest. It is however, easier to work on self-esteem first. Therefore, my approach in helping others psychologically involves first working to instill self-esteem before working on social interest issues and optimism.

If some are still dominated by their former bad habits, and yet can teach by mere words, let them teach. For perhaps, being put to shame by their own words, they will eventually begin to practice what they teach.

We are not Perfect: As you read this book, especially those of you who know me personally, you may pause and wonder like one friend of mine who, after reading my work, said to me, "It is indeed VERY good stuff. What I was continually asking is are you applying what you wrote here to your own life or is it just an intellectual exercise?" She added, "You see clearly the weaknesses of others, but I don't believe you truly know yourself."

I am aware that I am not perfect, and that I still have a long way to go toward attaining the things I have written in this book. However, I find consolation in the words of Nouwen (1975 who, in his book, *Reaching Out* says, "For a long time I have been hesitant to write this book, which has such a personal background. How can I tell others about reaching out, while I myself am so often caught in my own passions and weaknesses?"⁶ However, Nouwen, stated that he found some consolation and encouragement in the words of John the Ladder whom he quoted

⁶ Nouwen, (1994)

saying, “If some are still dominated by their former bad habits and yet can teach by mere words, let them teach. Perhaps, being put to shame by their own words, they will eventually begin to practice what they teach.”⁷ Don’t let my own weaknesses, as you know them, come between you and what you are reading in this book. I am still trying to practice what is written in this book, and I still have a long way to go.

This book is for those who wake up every morning frightened about everything, and wondering whether they will make it until evening. I want to say to them that the good news is: our mind has a power to create a “Heaven.”

Enjoy reading.

⁷ Nouwen (1975), p. 28.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PHYSICAL WAY OF BEING

Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say? Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them, is like the man or woman who when he or she built his or her house dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But the one who listens and does nothing is like the man or woman who built his or her house on soil, with no foundations: as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!

– Luke 6: 46–49

As we established in the introduction, human beings, are creatures that grow and are sustained in relationships. Any human being is confronted with the task of establishing four types of relationships for him or her to be whole. There is the physical relationship, the psychological relationship, the social relationship and the spiritual relationship. In other words, there are four ways of being in realizing wholeness: the physical, the psychological, the social, and the spiritual way of being. This chapter deals with the physical way of being. Of the four ways of being, the physical way is the most conspicuous. Unlike the others, we can touch, see, taste and smell the physical way of being. It imposes itself to the senses more than the psychological, the social, and the spiritual ways. Precisely, this chapter describes how we have to relate with the physical world around us.

The idea of a physical world embraces three things: our body, the environment in which we find ourselves and the tools we use in order to survive in that environment. The concept of body refers to the organism with all its organs and their organic processes. The heart is important to the body as well as the brain and the kidney. There are also the sensory systems such as taste, touch, etc. These too are important. For instance, what will happen if one can't taste or smell anything? In other words, everything about our body is as important as the other.

Intimately connected to the body is the environment where the body exists. Most probably, if we are taken to other planets we may not survive.

As an example, we need oxygen, other living and non-living things for us to survive. We need the force of gravity to keep us around the earth. The planet earth was equipped specifically to create the environment where human life is possible and can be sustained. We also need tools in order to survive in our environment. Other living organisms like animals are self-sufficient. We are not. We are creatures who need tools in order to manipulate our environment. A human being is the most powerful creature as long as tools are at one's disposal. For example, we need a house to make a home and protecting ourselves from weather elements; we need guns and spears to protect ourselves against dangerous wild creatures, enemies, and for hunting. We need means of transport to move from one place to another. The list is long. In the environment there are all the tools necessary for our survival. Of all living organisms, humans lead in needing their need for tools in order to survive. Other living organisms find it easy to survive. For example, a lion does not need a spear or a gun to hunt. Birds or animals don't need a means of transport to migrate long distances, like we humans do.

Unfortunately, those same tools that are necessary for human survival can at times become counterproductive to human growth. We are capable of using them wrongly. Likewise, we can abuse our bodies and neglect our environment. The main challenge we are constantly confronted is how to live in a healthy relationship with our physical world. The notion of a physical way of being embraces the relationship between a person and his or her environment. We need to constantly ask ourselves about the existing relationship between us and the tools we use to simplify our life, such as cars, houses, clothes, food, and recreational things. For example, is what we put into our bodies such as food and drinks contribute to our growth or cause diseases that result in shortening our life? How do we recreate? How do we use modern technology such as computers and television? Reflection on these questions, will hopefully stir us to reflect on the way we relate with ourselves, our environment and with our tools.

The measurement of this relationship is what I refer to as physical health. Physical health is attained when we have a sound relationship with ourselves, our environment and with our properties. In the following sections, physical exercises that are necessary in promoting physical health are presented. The notions: *Body* and *Universe* are used to categorize two types of physical exercises that go hand in hand. *Body* exercises are exercises that enhance the health relationship within ourselves, and *Universe exercises* involves exercises that enhance health relationship with the universe or the environment.

1.1 The Body

Learn first hand the transforming power of nurture to nature. Nourish your body with healthy food and pure water. Slow down and remember to breathe before taking a bite. Breathe out stress and negativity, breathe in oxygen and positive energy. Rediscover how marvelous it is simply to move: stretch, dance, walk, run jump, skip, play, and embrace. Pamper your body with comfortable clothes, quiet moment, and soothing beauty rituals.

— Sarah Ban Breathnach

All animals and humans have a condition that include drives, instincts, natural laws and cycles such as sleeping and waking, living and dying. Animals and individuals find themselves in this condition we simply call Body. There are also uncontrollable factors such as diseases and aging. We don't choose these conditions but they occur naturally. However, we are confronted with the challenge of finding a place in the midst of these conditions. Part of living my life is to be in touch with where I find myself and what I am. How do I take care of the conditions I find myself in?

The challenge of living in a body is to make sure it grows and becomes better with each day. It is true that I don't know or I am not aware of how I grow physically and expand, but there are certain activities I should undertake that facilitate that growth. Since my body is me, and I neither know how it happened to be here, nor when and how it will end, the most sure thing is my obligation to take care of it. What am I doing to make my body grow in a healthy way? It is not surprising that when we are born we are small and helpless. We have to be taken care of by others, but the time comes when instead of being taken care of by others, we start doing it ourselves.

This section is for those who have attained the age of assuming personal responsibility. What are you doing to care for yourselves? Unfortunately, maybe, when we were small and helpless, we ended up in hands that didn't take care of us as they should. But now that we are in control, are we taking care of ourselves, or are we continuing those destructive habits that others instilled in us? What we choose to eat or not to eat, the type of home and its surroundings we choose to have, where we choose to live, where we go to recreate and with whom we choose to relate, will make a difference on how we feel about ourselves.

What about us as individuals? Are we doing enough to put in place measures that prevent illness, or we are like firefighters confronting illnesses after we have them? We become what we think, we become what we eat, and of course we become what we do.

Promoting Healthy Living: The Oxford dictionary defines health as “the state of being free from illness or injury, or a person’s mental or physical condition.” Healthy living encompasses habits in us that promote good health and reduce the potential to contract illnesses whether physical or mental. Healthy living prevents illnesses rather than treats illnesses.

A lot of money is poured into treating illnesses by governments and insurance companies all over the world more than is spent preventing them. The healthcare systems in the world are overburden by people seeking medical attention. It is my belief that if we can create a culture of promoting healthy lifestyles, it will unburden our healthcare systems. Governments should inject more money into programmes that promote healthy living and in the long run it will reduce the cost of healthcare. For example, it costs less to promote a programme that teaches people how to eat healthy food than treating them when they have heart problems. Health insurance companies rarely or never give money for activities that promote health. They are mostly active when people fall victims to illnesses. Health insurance companies should also be active when people are healthy. Many government programmes in the world are for treating illness rather than preventing illness.

What about us as individuals? What are we doing to promote healthy lifestyles for ourselves? Are we doing enough to put in place measures that prevent illness, or we are like firefighters confronting illnesses after we have them? Do something now! Don’t wait until you are in that bed. Don’t stop drinking alcohol because of the threat to your kidney when the doctor tells you, “Two more bottles, the kidney is gone.” At 47 years old, I look back and see what I could have done differently. For example, each time I go for a physical check up, it shows that my blood has high cholesterol, but I keep eating cakes and eggs, thinking, “Just this one won’t hurt.” The question is, do we wait until we are affected by illnesses or do we spend time preventing illnesses?

These days I do physical exercises every morning and I have stopped eating food high in fat while eating more vegetables. However, this is only after the doctor had instructed me to do so because my blood sugar content was elevated. I was also told to reduce my weight from 94 to 75 kg. What I keep asking myself is why I didn’t do these things when all the medical tests indicated I was in good health. Why did I wait to have high blood sugar, before eating healthy food? My doctor put me on medication and told me to stop drinking any alcohol because it interfered with the medication. However, there are times I sneak in my mouth a glass of wine or beer, thinking I can’t spend the rest of my life without one. The truth is, I can.

We should always aim to take care of our physical being by practising healthy habits which prevent diseases. Are we what we were meant to be in

terms of health? Most probably, the answer is no. I believe that we become what we think, we become what we eat, and of course we become what we do. According to Michelle Andrews, “two thirds of adult Americans are either overweight or obese, and less than a third exercise at least three times a week.” She also states that, “24 million people have diabetes, the vast majority because of living unhealthy lifestyles. An additional 57 million people are pre-diabetic”⁸. This may be true also for the rest of the world. What affects our body also affects our mind, and which in turn affects our relationship with others.

Our behaviour can lead us into illnesses that otherwise can be avoided. For example 40% of all deaths are from avoidable causes. Most of us are leading lives that are adding unnecessary burden to our income.

Preventing deaths: Does it sound like a joke that death is preventable? The idea that death can be prevented may also sound blasphemous to all of us who believe that God knows the day we shall die, and that when that day comes one has to die by any means. I used to hold that belief as true when I was young - not anymore. At many funerals we hear common phrases such as “God has called him or her to heaven.” Without questioning the spiritual meaning of this phrase, which I believe (as a Christian) that when we die we go to God, I want to challenge you to be aware that some of our behaviours can lead us into illnesses that otherwise can be avoided. Michelle Andrews indicates that 40% of all United States deaths are from avoidable causes. She says these people died “because they failed to maintain a healthy weight, eat nutritiously and exercise, or because they smoked or drank excessively”.⁹

In the same study, in four of the six leading causes of death (heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes) excess weight was found to be a significant factor. It is also observed that “Obesity has fueled a 45% chance rise in diabetes over the past 20 years; someone born in the year 2000 has a one in three chance of developing the disease”.¹⁰ While these studies describe the American population, it may also be true in other parts of the world. We need to take them seriously. One thing I can prove is that whenever I ask my clients to exercise they become better, less anxious, and those who are depressed become less depressed.

My call is that we change from unhealthy living to healthy living. Close examination will indicate that most of us are leading lives that are adding unnecessary burden to our income. Examine your medical bill to see whether

⁸ Andrews, M, US News, February, (2009), p.10

⁹ News, February, ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

this is true or not for you. Michelle Andrews also states that “unhealthful behaviour takes a toll not only on individuals’ lives but also on the health-care system.” She gives an example, “In the United States, 16% of the Gross Domestic Product is spent on health care and it is projected to rise to 20% by the year 2017. Much of this healthcare spending can be tied up to preventable health problems.”¹¹

Doing better mostly reflects personal health habits which are not formed in doctors’ offices or found in medicine cabinets. Personal health behaviour such as physical exercises and eating nutritiously, are shaped by deliberate personal determination and will, by taking one step at a time towards developing to become part of us. To live is to be subjected to a series of choices, and we have an obligation to make right choices that enhance our physical way of being.

Making Right Choices: What make us shun necessary measures to care for ourselves? The studies I have quoted above may not bring new information that we did not know about caring for ourselves. Then why don’t we do it? I bought a Nike vest with the words “*Just do it*” written on it to remind myself that when it comes to matters of exercising, there is no room for negotiation, “*just do it.*” When we negotiate we come up with many excuses and we end up not doing what we are supposed to do. Dr Bernadine Healy writes, “It is not that most people don’t know their diet is awful or their midline is bulging or they are having a risky sex life. It is that they don’t take it to heart.”¹² Why don’t they take it to heart? She argues that we did not form healthful behaviour right from when we were young.

“What is missing, I think, is an all out effort to mobilize mothers. Mothers - not doctors or public-health experts - are the nexus of prevention . . . mom is the figure, everywhere in the world, best positioned to influence the behavior of those she loves. . . it is mom who has the babies and who usually spends the most time with them as they grow up.. . Wasn’t this always her role? We have all internalized mom’s wisdom. . . How last and wise it has been: ‘wash your hands,’ ‘Don’t run with a sharp object,’ ‘Stay away from bad friends,’ ‘You need your sleep,’ ‘Eat your broccoli.’ Really, mom’s directives were all about preventive medicine.”¹³

Dr Healy is saying healthy behaviour did not start in the heart of our homes. That caregiver, whoever he or she was, mom, father, grandmother etc, did not instill it in you in your early years. What she is saying is that healthy

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Dr Healey, B (2009) p.16

¹³ Ibid

behaviour is learned, which means, we can unlearn unhealthy behaviour by replacing it with healthy behaviour. That to me is good news, but it is tough work to replace behaviour that we learned in our early childhood.

Dr Healy invites us to look at the leading health indicators: “Physical activity, body weight, tobacco and substance abuse, sexual behavior, immunization, mental health and accidents.” She says, “If we did better in these areas, warding off many of the medical scourges of our time would be guaranteed. But doing better mostly reflects personal health habits which are not formed in doctors’ offices or found in medicine cabinets” (p. 16). Personal health behaviors such physical exercises, eating nutritiously, etc, are shaped by deliberate personal determination and will, by taking one step at a time towards developing to become part of us.

All of us have cells in our bodies that may lead to various kinds of illnesses. But whether we will develop those illnesses is another matter. There is body’s natural illness-fighting abilities which may be influenced by our behavior. Studies have shown that healthful behaviors increase the ability of our natural immune system to fight illnesses. How and what we eat, exercises, meditation etc, will make a difference. It is essential that we listen to our bodies, and seek medical attention immediately when we detect something is wrong. To live is to be subjected to a series of choices, and we have an obligation to make right choices that enhance our physical way of being.

1.2 The Universe

We can learn a lot by watching how water relates to the world around it. It's fluid. It goes around any obstacle in its way. It does not stop to argue! It flows downstream rather than struggling to push upstream as many of us are doing in life. It just goes with the flow.

— Suzan Jeffers

We are not only given the condition of drives, instincts and natural laws and cycles such as sleeping and waking, living and dying; we are not only confronted by uncontrollable factors such as diseases, and aging, but also there are other uncontrollable natural factors - the forces of the universe. The Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia in the internet, describes the universe as comprising everything that physically exists, the entirety of space and time, all forms of matter and energy, and the physical laws and constants that govern them. However, the term Universe may be used in slightly different contextual senses, denoting such concepts as the cosmos, the world, or Nature.¹⁴ As human beings, we live and are surrounded by different

¹⁴ Wikipedia

forms of matter and energy; we are governed by physical laws; we live in the space and are bound by time. Are we prepared to live in the universe that at times can be unfriendly? There are natural disasters such as storms, floods, volcano eruptions and others that make the world a very dangerous place, where our safety is not guaranteed. We have only this world, and we better learn to love it with all its dangers.

In the preceding section, I suggested ways to care for our body; in this section, my main focus is emphasizing the importance of taking care of our environment which is part and parcel of our existence. We are intimately connected to our environment; therefore, taking care of it is actually another way of caring for ourselves. What are we doing as human beings to reduce uncertainties due to uncontrollable natural factors such as global warming, floods, deforestation, etc? As individuals and as societies we are intimately connected to the universe.

There is a strong connection between what happens in our world and how it affects our body. Physical way of being involves doing something to our body and to our environment. I urge you to make sure where you live looks good, it will change your mental well being.

Caring for the Universe: Are we taking care of our environment? We are all connected to one universe. I am not a strong believer in astrology; that answers to most of our problems are found in the stars, but I somehow believe there is a strong connection between what happens in our world and how it affects our body, and in that matter, our mind . For example, in countries that experience winter, a correlation has been observed between winter and a number of depressed people. Don't we all feel good when we get up in a sunny beautiful day? Don't we feel some kind of peace when we find ourselves in a beautiful scenery of trees or flowers? Scientists have proved how human activities increase the probability of natural disasters happening such as floods, drought, etc. There is a difference when one drives on a pot-hole-filled road and when drives on paved roads. I feel relaxed and reach where I am going less tired when I drive on a smooth road than on a rough road.

Physical way of being involves doing something both to our bodies and to our environment. The untidy room may make one feel more depressed than a clean and well arranged room. There is a strong connection between our environment and our body. Caring for ourselves involves not only taking care of our bodies but also our environment. Part of taking care of our physical way of being involves caring for the universe. Sometimes we don't see this connection, but it exists. Unlike animals, human beings are poor communicators with the environment. For instance, we are told that during the Sunami disas-

ter in South East Asia, animals detected it was coming long before it reached the shore. Humans were not aware until they were caught up in it.

The environment affects how we feel and what we think, although we are not aware of it. When I was growing up in my village, I used to hear that “crazy people” in the village became crazier when the moon appeared for the first time, and us children, were told to be extra careful when we met crazy people during the time when the moon was still “young.” Whether this was true or not, is not important, I want to emphasize that the environment affects us greatly, and so neglecting the environment is neglecting ourselves. Make sure where you live looks good, it will change your mental well-being. Take care of your house, take care of your yard, and take care of the place where you spend more time. Dress well and it will change the way you feel and think.

Developing a wider view: Without the environment, social life is impossible. Literally speaking, we need the earth to move and do things that unite us with others. We are all connected to our environment. If the Amazon forests in South America disappear, it will affect the whole world. Scientists are telling us that snow in the earth’s poles is slowly melting due to global warming, and it is causing seas to rise. They say that if this phenomenon continues, some islands and beaches will disappear!

It may be hard to grasp that planting trees around Mount Kilimanjaro may change what is happening in Brazil, China or Australia, but remember that whatever you do in your backyard does not remain there. The ripple effects move beyond what you can imagine. We are a system of individuals connected together and our activities affect us all.

Let us be involved; don’t leave it to environmentalists only. The work of taking care of our environment is for us all. Plant trees around your yard or farm; be involved in conserving water sources; plant grass on bare land. Do something; get involved. Conserve energy. For example, don’t leave your lights on in your house when you don’t need them. Water is for all of us; use it when you need it; don’t let it to go to waste. We need to develop a sense that we are intimately connected to our environment, and whatever one does, affects all. We should take care of our universe because by doing so we are actually taking care of ourselves.

1.3 Summary

Whatever you do in your backyard does not remain there. The ripple effects move beyond what you can imagine. We are a system of individuals connected together and our activities affect us all.

In this chapter, it has been stated what it takes to promote the physical way of being, which, compared to the other ways of being, is more conspicuous. The physical way of being embraces ways that humans apply to relate with the physical world - body and universe. Two types of exercises have been proposed, where one type pertains nurturing the body and the other type aims at nurturing the universe. Body refers to the organism with all its organs and their organic processes. We take care of our body by promoting healthy behaviour such as developing a healthy lifestyle. This includes creating a behaviour that reduces the potential to contract illnesses, whether physical or mental. We should work more to prevent rather than treating illnesses. My conclusion is that to live is to make right choices that enhance our physical way of being.

The term 'Universe' refers to the space where we survive. As human beings, we live and are surrounded by different forms of matter and energy, we are governed by physical laws, and we live in the space, and are bound by time. Nurturing the universe involves using human power to maintain matter and energy, physical laws, and to reduce the disruption of the space we live in from its natural set up. Human activities such as farming, mining, hunting, etc, can disrupt the environment from its natural set up.

We are intimately connected with the environment; therefore, taking care of ourselves as physical beings involves taking care of our body, as well as our environment. Nurturing one and neglecting the other is partial living, and it is detrimental to wholeness living. The next chapter focuses on another way of being - the psychological way of being.

CHAPTER TWO

PSYCHOLOGICAL WAY OF BEING

The damage done to us during our childhood cannot be undone since we cannot change anything in our past. We can repair ourselves and gain our lost integrity by choosing to look more closely at the knowledge that is stored inside our bodies and bring that knowledge close to our awareness. This path, although certainly not easy, is the only route by which we can at last leave behind the cruel, invisible prison of our childhood.

– Alice Miller

Psychological way of being is an intra-relationship, which means, how a person relates with him or herself. It is about what is going on inside a person's mind. In other words, the notion of psychological way of being is about how values, ideals and actions of a person work together to sustain the person's well-being. Largely, a human being can be defined by what is going on in his or her mind. A mind of a person is the sum of what a person is. We are what we think and perceive. Our past experiences influence, in a strong way, our current life and it is all stored in the mind. The mind is one of the most important components of a person.

In this chapter, the measurement of a healthy mind is introduced. It is proposed that an individual's health state of the mind is measured by the amount of self-esteem the individual has. Studies have strongly suggested that self-esteem is a good indicator of a degree of health in one's mind. That is, the psychological way of being is directly proportional to self-esteem. The rest of this chapter describes self-esteem, and in Part 11, the practices that are necessary in raising the level of self-esteem in an individual will be introduced.

2.1 Definition of Self-Esteem

The purpose of human living is to lay down our lives for our friends. But we can't lay down our lives if we haven't taken them up.

– unknown author

The notion of self-esteem is more than a subjective inner experience; it is a self-awareness from which we see the world. It is that inner relationship that enables a person to relate with the external world. What we see in the world and in others is highly influenced by what we are internally. Before

we can have a solid relationship with another, we must have a relationship with ourselves.

In defining self-esteem, Branden (1994) emphasizes the internal and external factors that contribute to and support healthy self-esteem. According to Branden, “internal” factors are those factors residing within, or are generated by the individual such as ideas or beliefs, practices or behaviours. By “external” he means factors in the environment. These include messages verbally or non-verbally transmitted to the person, or experiences evoked by parents, significant others, teachers, organizations, and culture.

In their study, DuBois, et al. (2002) indicated the external influences on self-esteem. They investigated the influences of social support and self-esteem on adjustment in early adolescence in a two-year longitudinal study of 350 participants. Findings obtained indicate that to have a strong foundation, self-esteem is dependent on social support, a vital component, especially in the early stages of life. In defining self-esteem, looking at how our cognitive processes (those that make the foundation of our self-esteem) are put in place- by talking about the notion of *lifestyle*- will be the first step. The two components of self-esteem: *self-efficacy* and *self-respect* will then be explained. A brief overview to show that psychotherapy involves increasing the level of self-esteem will be provided.

2.1.1 Lifestyle

Cardan used astrological charts to predict the exact date of his death. To make sure that his prediction was accurate, he committed suicide on that day.

— unknown author

In *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Branden (1994) examines the internal and external influence of self-esteem. He investigates the contribution of the individual to his or her self-esteem, and the contribution of other people such as parents, teachers, leaders, managers, psychotherapists and the culture at large. The understanding of interplay between the internal and external factors on self-esteem is vital if we are to promote healthy self-esteem. In my view, the Adlerians have done a good job in explaining the relationship between internal factors and external factors in influencing self-esteem.

In this section, the Adlerian overview of the concepts of *lifestyle formation*, *lifestyle distortions* and *lifestyle dissonance* will be explored. These concepts will shed more light on the definition of self-esteem.

Early in life, a small child starts out by trial and error as he or she organizes the world in order to cope with it. The trial and error goes on all the time until the child finds his or her own rules and pattern that help the child to relate with the world in a predictable and secure way.

Lifestyle formation: According to Adlerians, there exists one dynamic basic force underlying all human activities. This force is known as the *lifestyle*. It exists early on in individuals' lives as they negotiate their way through life. As a child grows, he or she is confronted with the external environment and very soon the child has to learn to devise rules of surviving in this external world. While an animal is instinctually programmed to survive in the environment, a human being is equipped with the ability to program oneself through learning.¹⁵ Early in life, a child starts out by trial and error as he or she organizes the world in order to cope with it. The trial and error goes on all the time until the child finds his or her own rules and patterns that help the child to relate with the world in a predictable and secure way.

The *Lifestyle* is defined by Shulman and Mosak as a "singular pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that was unique to that individual and represented the context in which all specific manifestations had to be considered."¹⁶ To understand a person, one has to investigate a person's lifestyle. Since the lifestyle is in place before the child's nervous system is mature, and because we start out our life in imperfect families, there is a high probability of forming distorted perceptions of self, others, and the world early in our life.¹⁷ These distorted perceptions are the foundation of low self-esteem.

An evil spirit influences me . . . People are either good or bad . . . I must be loved by everyone . . . Focusing only on what is wrong . . . The world will be a safe place to live in when God eradicates all evil.

Lifestyle distortions: Low self-esteem is easily visible in the themes of a person's lifestyle distortions such as distorted attitudes about self. The following are examples: *I am inadequate compared to others; an evil spirit influences me; my way is the highway; nobody can love me; I am unworthy; I am cursed.* Other themes may involve an individual's distorted attitude about the world and people: *Life is unpredictable; people are either good or bad; life is about survival of the fittest; no mistake is pardonable; life is too danger-*

¹⁵ Shulman & Mosak (1995) p. 2

¹⁶ Shulman & Mosak p. 1

¹⁷ Ibid pp. 20–23

ous; *life is unfair*. Low self-esteem themes can also be found in a person's distorted goals such as: *I must be without flaws; I must be loved by everyone; I must be good always; I must be a saint; I must always be in control*.

We also find low self-esteem themes in people's distorted methods of operation. The following are examples: *Elevating oneself by finding faults in others; extreme dependency; excessive competitiveness – win/lose relationships; exploiting and manipulating others; rebelling against all authority; focusing only on what is wrong*. Distorted ideals can also reveal low self-esteem such as: *A real man should be aggressive, brave, daring and never lose; a real woman knows how to get what she wants from men; the world will be a safe place to live in when God eradicates all evil; I want to love as nobody else has done before; any sin committed should be punished by God; life is not worth living unless one is a star*. These are some examples of distorted thinking that may be found in the lifestyles of individuals with low self-esteem.

Any lifestyle that is characterized by distortions is bound for failure and disappointment. A state that results when an event occurs which does not meet one's expectation.

Lifestyle dissonance: Any lifestyle that is characterized by distortions is bound for failure and disappointment. At first, a child adopts a certain lifestyle because it serves the child's purpose well. However, as the child grows and meets different experiences from those encountered at the formation of the lifestyle, the child experiences cognitive dissonance; a state that results when an event occurs which does not meet one's expectation.

Ann's story (not her real name) may clarify cognitive dissonance.

When Ann was six years old, her father was involved in marital infidelity that caused a lot of verbal fights between her parents. As she was aware of her father's infidelity and how this strained his relationship with his wife (Ann's mother), Ann reported developing a mistrust of men. She got married at the age of 22. She describes her husband as a trustworthy person but they have been involved in some arguments because of Ann's repeated, unsubstantiated claim that husband is involved in an extra-marital affair.

While the mistrust of her father served Ann well because it protected her from her untrustworthy father, she is perpetuating the same lifestyle against a wrong person, and there is a cognitive dissonance. Ann has to learn to relate with men in a different way. She has to learn that some men can be trusted and give them the trust they deserve. The event of meeting a trustworthy man did not meet her expectation that "men should not be trusted."

2.1.2 Self-Efficacy

The mysterious challenge of the spiritual life is not primarily to give love, but to receive love.

– unknown author.

Branden (1994) defined self-esteem as “*the disposition to experience oneself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as worthy of happiness.*”¹⁸ In this definition, Branden emphasizes two components of self-esteem: *self-efficacy* and *self-respect*. In this section, the first component of self-esteem, *self-efficacy* is discussed. Self-efficacy is viewed from two aspects: *The ability to manage our environment*, and *the ability to pursue our goals*.

We are naturally capable of thinking and we can cope with the basic challenges of life. However, we may lack confidence to use these gifts due to distortions we developed during the formation of our lifestyle.

Ability to manage our environment: By self-efficacy, Branden is referring to the “confidence in the functioning of my mind, in my ability to think, understand, learn, choose, and make decisions . . . my ability to understand the facts of reality that fall within the sphere of my interests and needs; self-trust; self-reliance.”¹⁹ Self-efficacy involves confidence in our ability to manage the world around us; the ability to think for ourselves and to cope with the basic challenges of life.

Branden’s definition is preferable because it puts a person in charge of his or her life. We do not become victims of nature or past experiences. In his definition above, Branden is suggesting that self-esteem is something we give to ourselves if we can be confident to exploit the gifts with which we were born. We are naturally capable of thinking and we can cope with the basic challenges of life; however, we may lack confidence to use these gifts due to the distortions we developed during the formation of our lifestyle. That is when low self-esteem creeps in.

We are the one species that can formulate a vision of what values are worth pursuing – and then pursue the opposite.

Ability to pursue our goals: Although it is our birthright to be happy and efficacious, this right does not happen automatically as if it is wired in us

¹⁸ Branden (1994), p. 18

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 26

²⁰ Branden, p. 30

by nature. Through using our intelligence in searching for and creating goals, we continue recreating ourselves. To be efficacious is to be capable of producing desired results. As Branden puts it, “We are the one species that can formulate a vision of what values are worth pursuing – and then pursue the opposite”.²⁰ In this sense, we limit ourselves, for even the Master says, “Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you.”

2.1.3 Self-Respect

There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation.

– Herbert Spencer

Confidence in our ability to face the challenges of life is strengthened by self-respect; the other component of self-esteem. Self-respect emphasizes the confidence in our right to be successful and happy. We are entitled to assert our needs and wants; that is, we are entitled to achieve our values and enjoy the fruits of our labour. To sum up, we are meant to be happy. In this section, the concepts, *be who we are* and *the right to exist* are used as the two notions that give us the meaning of self-respect.

We all have a share in this life; if we don't use our self-efficacy to the best of our ability, we will settle for less than our entitlement, and someone else will, of course, take it.

Be who we are: Branden believes that we need to be who we are without comparing ourselves to others. It is his conviction that we are who we are, and who we are is good, since it is just who we are. Someone once said, “Go to the whole world; you will never find a person like me.” The life-style distortions listed earlier are usually from people who do not respect who they are. Respecting oneself means knowing the truth, as the Master advises, “Know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” This is the truth about oneself, others, the world, and about God. For example, a person who concludes, “*I am inadequate compared to others*” is not respecting who he or she is.

We all have had an experience where we compare ourselves to others and conclude that others are superior to us. However, by so doing, we normally generalize in one area where we feel a lack or weakness and we become blind to other areas where we are strong. Father Tom's story may clarify this point.

Father Tom used to go to a parish for Sunday Masses feeling very nervous before each homily time. Reflecting on this, he discovered he was threatened by his parishioners because he perceived them as being more learned and wealthier than he. However, in discussing theology and the scripture with them, he discovered that they looked to him for guidance for they regarded him as having more knowledge in theology than they did. This taught him that nobody is more inadequate than others in all areas of life, because, he concluded, nobody knows everything.

Being who we are does not mean we shouldn't work on ourselves to become better than what we are. Growth continues until one meets one's death. There can be a danger of underachieving and settling for less than we are entitled to if we don't work on developing ourselves. We all have a share in this life; if we don't use our self-efficacy to the best of our ability, we will settle for less than our entitlement, and someone else will, of course, take it.

Respecting oneself involves an awareness of one's weaknesses and strengths. It involves being aware of the things one can or can't realistically do and respecting oneself as one is. Later, in Part 11, this point will be revisited in the discussion about self-acceptance."

Without sound self-esteem founded on self-respect, the tasks of life can become areas of escape from real problems.

Right to exist. Self-respect is an "assurance of my value; an affirmative attitude toward my right to live and to be happy; comfort in appropriately asserting my thoughts, wants and needs; the feeling that joy and fulfillment are my natural birthright".²¹ When I work hard to be who I am; that is, to be the person I was meant to be, I begin to see the purpose of why I am here on earth. There is a purpose for each of us to be here, including our experiences. Most of us do not take time to discover the purpose of our being. Everything that happens in our lives, from the moment we are born until we die, happens for reasons. The major task is to discover what those reasons are. For example, speaking on television, John Bradshaw said that he understood why he was born in his family where his alcoholic father left the home when John was still small. He also said that later he himself became alcoholic and had to go through Alcoholic Anonymous (A. A.). John said he found meaning in his life by recognizing that those circumstances were preparing him for work with families. John has done extensive work through TV and talks, educating parents about a healthy

²¹ Branden, p. 26

family. He felt confident to speak on behalf of wounded children because he himself had been there.

Without respecting and accepting who we are, our ability to face the challenges of life becomes an escape. Life provides many challenges that require our attention. Tasks of life such as work and relationships are necessary challenges that require our full participation if we are to grow to maturity. Without sound self-esteem founded on self-respect, the tasks of life can become areas of escape from real problems. For example, we know that it is important to work and involve ourselves in relationships, but becoming “workaholics” or immersing oneself into a “toxic” relationship as a way of combating poor self-esteem is escapism.

2.1.4 Self-Esteem and Psychotherapy

Do not try to remake yourself into something you're not. Just try making the best of what God made.

— Sarah Ban Breathnach

This section briefly contends that psychotherapy involves correcting lifestyle distortions that are at the heart of low self-esteem, and formulating a new lifestyle that is more realistic about life. It is my belief that individuals seek psychological help because they see themselves as incompetent in managing their life. Part II will maintain that fostering social interest and optimism should begin with fostering self-esteem because without a sense of competence, one may find it hard to cooperate with others or be optimistic about the future.

Self-esteem is not something one is born with, but a consequence of our self-efficacy and self-respect. In *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Branden suggests that we cannot work on self-esteem directly. Therefore, he proposes some actions that we can deliberately take in order to raise the level of our self-esteem. These include “the practice of living consciously, the practice of self-acceptance, the practice of self-responsibility, the practice of self-assertiveness, the practice of living purposefully and the practice of personal integrity”.²² These practices make what Branden calls, “The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem.”

These practices will be discussed in depth in Part 11. This section simply highlights that low self-esteem is the main cause of mental illness and that there is no quick fix in treating low self-esteem.

²² Branden, p. 65

The main cause of many psychological problems is the disabling state of low self-esteem. When low self-esteem is not recognized and treated for itself, it defies intervention, leaving both therapist and client frustrated with the lack of progress.

Cause of mental illnesses: According to Sorensen (1998), therapists should examine issues of self-esteem while working with clients. In her book, *Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem*, Sorensen explains why many people spend time in therapy without getting better. She states:

*We have been encouraged to examine the dysfunctional family, shame, and co-dependency from every angle . . . While these approaches may have provided partial understanding and new insights, many still feel that no one has fully addressed the problems they struggle with . . . Thus peace, happiness and fulfillment continue to be elusive.*²³

On the basis of her personal experience while working in clinical settings, Sorensen concludes that the main cause of many psychological problems is the disabling state of low self-esteem. She argues that low self-esteem is the root cause of most pain and discomfort people continue to experience. Thus, she concludes, low self-esteem is a client's primary problem. She further advises, "When low self-esteem is not recognized and treated for itself, it defies intervention, leaving both therapist and client frustrated with the lack of progress".²⁴

It is possible to break free of negative self-concepts and self-defeating behaviour and that one can dissolve internal barriers to success in work and love.

No quick fix: There is no quick fix in treating low self-esteem because it involves removing lifetime and profoundly established dysfunctional patterns. Therefore, a person suffering from low self-esteem "will have to acquire new skills, change old attitudes, and develop a new perspective – all of which takes considerable time".²⁵ Sorensen does not see benefits in short-term therapy; she argues that this does not effectively treat low self-esteem.

In *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem*, Branden (1988) argues that the level of self-esteem can be raised. He gives a step-by-step guide to strengthening a sense of worth. He shows that it is possible to break free of negative self-

²³ Sorensen (1998) p. 1

²⁴ Sorensen (1998) p. 4

²⁵ Ibid, p.5

concepts and self-defeating behaviour, and that one can dissolve internal barriers to attain success in work and love. It is also possible to overcome anxiety, depression, guilt and anger. Branden also indicates that fear of intimacy can be conquered; success and courage to love oneself more can be achieved.

In conclusion, Branden's definition of self-esteem where he perceives self-esteem as one's disposition to experience competence in coping with the basic challenges of life and as worthy of happiness can be adopted. Human living is about building competence. As we become more competent in overcoming the basic challenges of life such as building relationships and other tasks of life, we become fulfilled. This fulfillment is what brings happiness. Naturally, we are meant to live happily. No one who is incompetent to cope with the basic challenges of life can be happy. This definition suggests that although we are entitled to be happy, this happiness does not happen without our effort. When we work hard to face the challenges of life, the benefits are competence and fulfillment that consequently bring happiness. This is what I believe is self-esteem.

In this section, it has been argued that lifestyle distortions are at the heart of all incompetence. We establish these distortions early in our lives as we negotiate our way to find a place in life. These distortions are the results of oversimplifying, exaggerating, and mistaking the reality that is presented to us when we are young and our central nervous system is not mature enough to perceive the reality of things as they are. Lifestyle distortions are the major source of low self-esteem.

Later, it will be proposed that psychotherapy involves correcting lifestyle distortions that are at the heart of low self-esteem and formulating a new lifestyle that is more realistic about life. This work takes a considerable amount of time; there is no quick fix. Following are concrete examples indicating characteristics of self-esteem:

2.2 Characteristics of Self-Esteem

Genuine happiness can only be realized once we commit to making it a personal priority in our lives. This may be new behaviour for some of us, and a bit intimidating. Be gentle to yourself. It will all unfold. Today you may not be familiar with happiness habits. But like any new behaviour, happiness can be learned.

— Sarah Ban Breathnach

In this section, the concepts of *courage*, *influence*, *root cause* and *lifespan* will be used to shed more light on the subject of self-esteem. Although

I am not claiming my list to be inclusive of all the characteristics of self-esteem, I believe these concepts provide a comprehensive explanation about the manifestation of self-esteem.

2.2.1 Courage

Being people of courage and hope does not mean not feeling afraid; rather, courage is the willingness to stay open to our fear and our rawness, without running away. None of us is courageous all the time. With fear we embark on most journeys. Courage appears when we are willing to sit at the edge of our pain and look at it face to face.

– Stanislaus Kennedy

Studies reveal that individuals with low self-esteem give up very easily, especially during times of crisis. Di-Paula and Campbell (2002) examined self-esteem, persistence and rumination in the face of failure. They manipulated a degree of failure and availability of goal alternatives. When an alternative was available, high self-esteem (HSE) participants became more persistent than low self-esteem (LSE) participants after a single failure.

Likewise, LSE individuals are sensitive to perceive negative signs from others. Murray, et al. (2002) in three experiments examined how needs for acceptance might hinder people's capacity to protect their relationships when confronted with difficulties. They found that LSE participants were over sensitive to problems, perceiving them as a sign that their partner's attention might be waning. They then despised their partner and distanced themselves. Paradoxically, the unrealistic need for acceptance may lead to LSE people perceiving rejection where none exists, unnecessarily jeopardizing closeness. On the other hand, HSE participants were found to be less sensitive to rejection and acknowledged their partners even when they were threatened. In this section, courage will be discussed using two notions: *striving for significance* and *healthy courage*.

Living is about turning those "minuses" into "pluses." Life is full of ups and downs, but courage helps us to begin again each time we hit the lowest spot in our life.

Striving for significance: Studies have demonstrated an important characteristic of self-esteem – *courage* – and what happens to people when they lack courage; their self-esteem deflates. Courage in this case refers to striving for significance in life. As human beings we are born with "minuses." Therefore, life is about turning those "minuses" into "pluses," in other

words, building competence. Early on in life, our self-esteem is damaged if we are not taught proper ways of building competence.

Building competence involves facing the tasks of life, pushing on in spite of the obstacles we face on the way. Courage is that inner force in us that makes us push forward always toward our growth until our life here on earth is no more. Life is full of ups and downs, but courage helps us to begin again each time we hit a low spot in our lives.

Any movement toward building one's competence should make sure that others, too, are moving toward building their competence. Those who live their life or build competence at the expense of other people suffer the same consequence as those who stay idle and let fate determine their life without their participation.

Healthy courage: It is important to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy courage. Healthy courage is not self-centred; it recognizes that in this world one is not alone but is with others. As a result, any movement toward building one's competence should make sure that others, too, are moving toward building their competence. Healthy courage engages into a win/win relationship; "I gain, you gain, you gain I gain." Unhealthy courage is self-centred, where what matters is "I win; I don't care whether others lose or gain." Having unhealthy courage is as destructive as not having courage at all. Those who live their life or build competence at the expense of other people suffer the same consequence as those who stay idle and let fate determine their life without their participation. They both suffer the effects of low self-esteem.

2.2.2 Influence

Wean yourself away from the opinion of others – however talented, creative and celebrated they may be – as you continue to journey within.

– Sarah Ban Breathnach

Self-esteem is always shaped by the environment or context in which we find ourselves. For example, our culture, friends, relatives, education system, language, etc., can influence the level of our self-esteem. Liwei and Jinpang (2002) compared the relative importance of individual self-esteem with collective self-esteem for judgment on general life satisfaction and career satisfaction. The results of their study suggest that different self-esteems are needed to predict different satisfactions.

This section looks at influence as *soft-determinism* which could only be handled well by *seeing the reality*.

With or without us there is life. Without realizing it, we find a long time has passed. We tend to think nothing can be changed.

Soft determinism: There has been debate about whether people are determined or not determined. Determinism assumes total causality, while non-determinism assumes no causality at all. Adlerian psychology stresses the middle way, *soft-determinism*, between determinism and non-determinism. Soft determinism stresses influences, not causes, and speaks of probabilities and possibilities, not givens (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). By influence, the soft determinism is emphasized, which means nature does not determine us but influences us. For example, a person born with traits of becoming an alcoholic is not necessarily bound to become an alcoholic. Much depends on the choices taken. We are free to choose, as Mosak and Maniacci point out that “freedom to choose is not the same as freedom of choice. Life does impose certain limits, and within those limits one is free to choose. Freedom of choice typically implies unlimited choice. That rarely exists”.²⁶

It is vital to be aware of the influences that affect our self-esteem; otherwise life will continue without us. With or without us there is life. Without realizing it, we find a long time has passed. We tend to think nothing can be changed. Read the story below about a Sister who believed she could not change her behaviour.

A forty-five year-old religious Sister had been with her community for thirty years. She had a problem relating with male friends. She was outgoing and easily made friends. She had many male friends, some of whom asked to be “close” to her, but when this happened, she retreated and feeling scared, ended up avoiding relationships altogether. She complained of feeling very lonely as she would have liked to have a close male friend. However, she was reluctant because she viewed being close to a man in any circumstance as being wrong. Although she acknowledged having many male friends, the friendships seemed superficial, which according to her didn’t contribute to the growth she needed. She reported being in desperate need of a male friend with whom she could share deep feelings about life. However, she was afraid, thinking that the vow of chastity made it wrong for her to be close to a man.

²⁶ Mosak and Maniacci p. 18

She had entered the convent at the age of fifteen, and had not had any experience of relating with males. With the benefit of hindsight, she thought she entered the convent as a way of protecting herself from men. She related experiencing a bad relationship with her father because of his “infidelity.” She said that she had decided early on in her life that men could not be trusted. She thought choosing a religious way of life was her way of protecting herself from men.

The story above is a good example of how we can be influenced by our past experiences. The experience with her father influenced her belief that men could not be trusted, and so she did not take the needed time during her formative years to build the skills needed to relate with men.

In order to see the reality, we are called not to run into institutions or structures that protect us from facing the issues that cause low self-esteem in us.

Seeing the reality: As a religious Sister, the Sister in the story above developed a belief that being close to a man is wrong when one has taken a vow of chastity. Although she has succeeded in being faithful to her vow of chastity, she does not feel the fulfillment and joy that comes from living that vow because she is using her vow of chastity in a wrong way – as a way of running away from men – and in consequence, it is leading to low self-esteem. We can develop skills that increase our self-esteem. We are free to choose all the time. We may not change or control certain circumstances, but we have the power to choose our feelings about those circumstances (Frankl, 1984).

In order to see the reality, we are called not to run into institutions or structures that protect us from facing the issues that cause low self-esteem in us. The Sister's embrace of the vow of chastity in a religious order did not take away her anxiety about men. Only after she was able to see the reality of her issues stemming from her childhood years, was she able to feel confident in her religious life, and to experience peace and fulfillment as a religious Sister. Seeing the reality involves perceiving ourselves as we are and deciding what we are going to do with ourselves. It involves devising goals that lead to growth.

2.2.3 Root Cause

The main cause of many psychological problems is the disabling state of low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is the root cause of most pain and discomfort people continue to experience.

– Marilyn Sorensen

Paradise and Kernis (2002) examined the extent to which self-esteem is associated with mental health. The results of their study indicate that high self-esteem was associated with a great mental health while low self-esteem was associated with little mental health. On the same issue, in their study of paraplegia due to a spinal cord injury, Tzonichaki and Kleftras (2002), examined the relationship between self-esteem, loneliness, and life satisfaction in the metropolitan area of Athens. As expected, statistically significant correlations were observed in self-esteem, life satisfaction and loneliness. More specifically, the higher an individual's self-esteem, the higher the life satisfaction and the lower the feelings of loneliness were experienced. Furthermore, there was a statistically negative relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction.

The suggestion in this section is that when we lack proper engagements in life and take shortcuts toward solving our problems, we become vulnerable to mental illness.

Psychological problems happen when people, because of living on the sideline,; that is evading life for too long, fail to develop the necessary skills to help them engage in the necessary and important work of building relationships.

Lack of engagement: Working on developing self-esteem should be at the heart of any mental health work. As stated above, courage is striving for significance in life. The significance is an outcome of success in building one's competence. A discouraged person has no sense of confidence; he or she lacks skills of living and so sets no goals for life. Such a person is vulnerable to many psychological problems.

In the second part of this book, it will be argued that instilling self-esteem should be at the centre of all psychological interventions. As people feel competent to face the challenges of life, they grow and become whole. Therefore, living is about making ourselves competent, it is about acquiring skills. Psychological problems happen when people, because of living on the sidelines, that is, evading life for too long, fail to develop the necessary skills to help them engage in the necessary and important work of building relationships. They stifle themselves and lack courage to begin

again. Self-esteem is the root cause of all psychological problems. Nobody who participates in the affairs of life will feel psychologically lacking.

The best cure for most psychological problems is to invite clients to active participation in life. Working experience in a mental health institution that attended to critically ill clients, who were all, at the time, not engaged in anything brought about this assertion. After going through the patients' background history, I discovered that discouragement was at the heart of their mental illnesses. Since childhood, they had experienced discouragement in many ways. The story of Tim (not his real name) below clarifies the point.

Tim is 42 years old, the second born in a family of six children. Tim reported that his father used alcohol excessively and that he worked in a factory by day and as a musician in bars and taverns at night. Tim also reported that his father was abusive and harsh to Tim's mother and siblings. Discipline included belt whippings and beatings with brooms and rolled-up newspapers. Tim also said he witnessed a lot of screaming between his parents.

Tim's family moved a lot due to financial difficulties. His parents divorced when Tim was eight years old and his father dropped out of the picture. His mother could not cope with the size of the family and its financial needs. Tim and his siblings were put in foster homes when Tim was nine years old. Tim was able to have visits with his mother only three or four times during the first year in foster care. The oldest girl was placed with her grandmother and the younger five including Tim went to live in a foster home. Three of his brothers were sent away from the foster home because of misbehaving and Tim lost contact with them. Tim and one brother stayed but he reported that they were often beaten with belts and horse leads. Tim stated that he was sexually abused by his foster mother's cousin over a period of one year. Tim said that he complied with the abuse out of fear that the cousin would kill him if he told anyone. The foster home lost its license, and Tim was moved to another foster home. At that time all the children were split up. Tim spent a year in this new foster home. His mother regained custody of the children when Tim was 12 years old. According to Tim, his mother worked a lot and the family struggled financially. The children had little supervision and Tim was one of the heads of the household.

He had been doing well in school but when he returned home to live with his mother, his grades started falling. Tim dropped out of school at the age of 16, and at the age of 18, he joined the army. He spent a year in the army and was discharged, apparently, because he had trouble with

authority and could not follow orders. Tim went home and moved back in with his mother who had since remarried.

Tim had various jobs and relationships, none of which lasted long. He met his wife when he was 29 and they married when he was 31. Tim and his wife had one child, a girl. At first, he says, he was happy but over the years "there have been a lot of rough spots." Violence became one of the characteristics of the marriage. Tim reported that his wife started having extra-marital affairs. She threw him out of the house and got a court order of protection against him. When Tim was thrown out of his house and could not see his daughter, he attempted suicide and was hospitalized.

Tim viewed himself as a loner - did everything by himself, went hunting and fishing by himself, liked to work alone and did not like to be bothered by people. Tim felt he would be happiest living alone in the forest. The one person Tim felt close to and truly cared about was his daughter.

The family history indicates that Tim's grandmother committed suicide after she lost custody of Tim's older sister when the other children were in foster care. She shot herself in the head. Her son, Tim's uncle, also committed suicide by hanging himself.

Tim became a client after he had called on the advice of his brother's girlfriend requesting help at a counseling centre where I was working. At the time, he was living with his brother after being kicked out of his house by his wife who had filed for divorce. Tim was depressed, had mood swings and suicidal thoughts. He had been hospitalized for a suicide attempt where he took an intentional overdose of 26 Zoloft, 21 Xanax, and 16 sleeping pills. Tim was unemployed at the time and was in the process of filing for disability support.

As there is no shortcut to "heaven," neither should we think we can take a shortcut to growth. Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Shortcuts: In our environment there are numerous factors that may invite discouragement. These may include wars, poverty, crime, famine, bad political systems, people's selfishness, various forms of discrimination, dysfunctional family systems, etc. Since these circumstances are inevitable, we all have to take a stand and come up with problem-solving strategies in resolving them. When we resort to less effective means of solving these

problems, the possibility for growth is stifled. As there is no shortcut to heaven, neither should we think we can take a shortcut to growth.

The Master advised, “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 6: 13-14). Working with Tim, I encouraged him to be bold enough to keep looking for employment, and to start living on his own. As he fought his depression and went out looking for employment, in spite of his depression, his effort paid off. He found employment and a few months later he reunited with his wife and daughter, and the depression disappeared.

When my friend read Tim’s story and my conclusion that after Tim had found employment “he reunited with his wife and daughter and the depression disappeared,” she wondered, “And this guy’s problems were all solved, after what he lived through? Impossible.” Of course other things were done such as going through the “Six pillars of self-esteem” to help with his recovery process. This is not to suggest that Tim’s securing of employment solved everything, but let it be noted again that what happens in our life does not define us. Certainly, we are influenced by our past experiences but the stand we take toward them makes a difference.

Tim’s problems may or may not be because of his past life. Low self-esteem resulting from lifestyle distortions is most probably the root cause of mental illnesses. Tim lived in the environment where he formed distortions about himself, others, and the world, and those put him in the position he was in. In one of our sessions, Tim reported that one of his brothers was very successful with a good paying job and a family. Tim and his brother both lived in the same environment and were subjected to the same circumstances, but Tim failed while his brother succeeded. There must be other factors than past events to explain our mental condition. The interpretation one gives to the events that happen in one’s life is the root cause of many psychological problems.

²⁷ Erikson, E (1963) p. 37

2.2.4 Lifespan

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.

— Ecclesiastes 12: 1–2

Some studies have revealed that the level of self-esteem varies across the lifespan. Robins, et al. (2002) examined global self-esteem across the lifespan and found that self-esteem levels were high in childhood, dropped during adolescence, rose gradually throughout adulthood, and declined sharply in old age. This trajectory is generally held across gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and nationality. This is a very interesting revelation that needs attention. This section highlights some of the reasons that may cause self-esteem variations across the lifespan by discussing notions of *systems* and *stages of development*.

Human life as experienced by an individual is the result of interaction and modification of three key systems: the biological system, the psychological system, and the societal system.

Systems: Note that self-esteem is high during childhood and adulthood, but low during adolescence and old age. What does that tell us about these periods? As Erik Erikson (1963) puts it, "Human life as experienced by an individual is the result of interaction and modification of three key systems: the biological system, the psychological system, and the societal system."²⁷

The *biological system* involves processes necessary for the physical functioning of the person. Sensory abilities, respiratory functioning, motor responses, endocrine and circulatory systems, etc., are part of biological processes. Change in these processes is guided by genetics, nutrition, sunlight and other life events such as diseases and accidents.

The *psychological system* comprises processes necessary to thinking and reasoning. Memory and perception, language, problem-solving mechanisms and symbolic abilities all require the use of psychological processes. Like the biological system, the psychological system develops and changes over a person's lifespan. The *societal system* involves all those processes through which a person becomes integrated into a society. They include

²⁸ Newman, Newman (1975) p. 39

²⁹ Ibid, p. 40

social roles, social expectations, belief systems, leadership systems, communication pattern, family organization, political ideologies, etc. Self-esteem stability will depend on how successfully we resolve these challenges.

Newman and Newman (1975) described *their psychosocial theory of human development* as “a product of the interaction between individual (psycho) needs and abilities and societal (social) expectations and demands”.²⁸ According to them, a psychosocial theory is based on 5 organizing concepts: the stages of development, developmental tasks, the psychosocial crisis of each stage, a radiating network of significant relationships, and coping.²⁹ A detailed description of these concepts is beyond the scope of this book. However, provided below is a brief comment on how self-esteem is affected as a person moves through the stages of human development.

Failure to integrate the achievement of earlier stages into the behaviour of the next stage of development may result in low self-esteem.

Stages of development: A return to the study of Robins, et al. (2002) would help reveal why self-esteem was found to be higher during childhood and adulthood, but lower during adolescence and old age? A detailed explanation as given by Erik Erikson (1963) in explaining the stages of development will be used. The point of emphasis is that in each stage of an individual's development, there are tasks to fulfill and failure to integrate the achievement of earlier stages into the behaviour of the next stage of development may result in low self-esteem.

Childhood is a stage of learning; the foundation of future activities is established during this stage. Typically, healthy children trust others. They are aware of their weakness and so they develop total trust in others for everything. As a boy I thought that my father was the most powerful person on earth. When he was at home, I felt very safe. Children do not get worried about life as grown-ups do, and they play a lot. They know very well how to take one day at a time. The Master says, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to the one who is like a child.” By putting it this way, the Master is inviting his followers to trust in God as children trust their parents. This is not just a Christian virtue, but a necessary quality for enhancing self-esteem. It is a call to trust in the power of the universe. Life has so much to offer to us and it will happen if we believe that it will be given to us. However, if we worry ourselves, imagining the worst from life, we remain with no energy to learn the necessary skills for us to tackle life's challenges.

Adolescence is the time for physical maturation and separation from parents. This can be a time of great anxiety because a child who has been dependent on his or her caregivers has to venture out alone and establish his or her identity. During adolescence, an individual becomes unstable as

he or she tries out different things as a way of finding a place in the world. This may be a period of low self-esteem because of the instability that an individual experiences. If the adolescence crises and tasks are handled properly, by the time one hits adulthood, one would have achieved stability and found a place.

If we spend our young years on triviality, instead of establishing a solid foundation for our life, we should not expect a happy retirement.

The major tasks during adulthood are establishing intimate relationships, management of career and establishing a family. Generally, it is a time of acceptance of one's life. Successful handling of these tasks leads to high self-esteem. Old age is the time mainly characterized by losses. During this period, a person is confronted with coping with the physical changes brought about by aging. By this time a person will have experienced losses of loved ones such as parents, siblings, friends or a spouse. Older individuals also face the challenge of retiring from careers that may have been meaningful to them. If this period is not properly handled by developing a proper system that places all past experiences in a perspective that brings meaning to an aging person, it could be a source of low self-esteem.

If a person moves through earlier stages successfully, the old age stage will be a time of meaning. That is why Ecclesiastes advises us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, before it is too late when we will start saying, "we have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12: 1–2). If our early years are spent on triviality, instead of establishing a solid foundation for our life, we should not expect a happy retirement.

In summary, I hope the concepts: *courage*, *influence*, *root cause* and *lifespan* have shed more light on the subject of self-esteem. I believe these concepts have provided an overview of how self-esteem manifests itself. *Courage* brings competence, which in turn increases self-esteem. In spite of obstacles in life, one who is courageous continues working towards growth. The concept of *influence* points to the fact that there are many factors that affect self-esteem. Self-esteem is influenced by the context in which we find ourselves. For example, our culture, friends, relatives, education system, language, etc., influence our self-esteem. While it is important to be aware of these influences, it is equally important to be aware that our environment does not define us. *Root cause* introduces the idea that individuals who suffer from psychological illness are actually suffering from low self-esteem. Finally, the *lifespan* concept introduces a belief that self-esteem varies across a lifespan. Self-esteem was observed to vary across the lifespan. In each stage of life there are crises and tasks that either reduce or

³⁰ Manaster & Corsini (1945) p. 4

increase self-esteem. In the following section, *Self-Esteem in Everyday Life*, more information about self-esteem is provided.

2.3 Self-Esteem in Everyday Life

Healthy adaptation requires an accurate perception of the universe and accurate perception often evokes pain.

– George Vallant

This section discusses the power of perception on self-esteem and life in general. Two concepts; *phenomenology* and *public victory* will be used to explain this power. While *phenomenology* deals with a person's perception of reality, *public victory* expresses one's place in the society. This section emphasizes that whatever goes on in a person's mind affects his or her place in society. It is important to understand these notions because they give more insight into the meaning of self-esteem.

2.3.1 Phenomenology

Truth is always greater than any structure built to contain it.

– Robert Anthony

The Adlerians describe the notion of subjective understanding in the concept of phenomenology, which essentially means what is subjective and personal. Phenomenology refers to a person's direct experience; that reality is perceived by individuals not as reality in itself but as individuals see that reality. Reality, then, is a person's impression. (Manaster & Corsini, 1945,)³⁰ This section explores phenomenology in detail by focusing on the concepts: *Subjective understanding* and *psychology of use*.

Stigma in itself does not cause low self-esteem, but the subjective understanding of stigma in a person does. How a person views herself or himself is more important than people's views of him or her.

Subjective understanding: Some studies have investigated how people's perception affects self-esteem. Camp, et al. (2002), examined how to determine whether low self-esteem was an inevitable consequence of stigma.

Corsini (1999) defined stigma as "a personal trait that clearly distinguishes the individual from others and which constitutes or is assumed to constitute

³¹ Corsini

a physical, psychological, social disadvantage; for example, a physical deformity, a known history of criminal conduct or psychiatric illness, a different sexual preference.” Corsini also added that the term stigma “signifies social disapproval and may lead to discrimination or social isolation.”³¹

Camp and his colleagues examined the relationship between stigma and self-esteem through critical examination of a modified labeling theory by examining perceptions of stigma and their relationship to self-evaluation in women with chronic mental health problems. The study involved ten women aged 22 to 57 years, who had been diagnosed with mental disorders for at least one year. It was revealed that although the women were aware of society’s misrepresentation of mental illness and the effects this had on their lives, they did not accept these representations as valid. The participants did not deny their mental health problems, but what mattered was their endorsement of labels. Labels were rejected when they were viewed as portraying a faulty and negative stereotype or when the women perceived that their symptomatology did not fit with the given diagnosis.

This study illustrates the importance of considering people’s subjective understanding of stigmatized conditions and societal reactions in order to understand the relationship between stigma and the self. Stigma in itself does not cause low self-esteem, but the subjective understanding of stigma in a person does. How a person views herself or himself is more important than people’s views of him or her.

It is not what you have that counts, but rather what you do with what you have. Some people with advantage may fail while others with disadvantage may succeed.

The psychology of use: Adlerian psychology emphasizes the psychology of use as opposed to the psychology of possession. The psychology of use insists that “it is not what you have that counts, but rather what you do with what you have. Some people with advantage may fail while others with disadvantage may succeed”. (Manaster & Corsini, 1995).³² The distinction between the psychology of use and the psychology of possession will be discussed later.

In this subsection, the concept, *psychology of use*, emphasizes that our behaviour normally matches the way we perceive reality. A person may use depression to get sympathy from others because receiving sympathy brings some kind of satisfaction to that person. What we do with what we have is influenced by our lifestyle; that is, by the convictions we made early on about

³² Manaster & Corsini (1995) p. 4

³³ Covey (1990) p. 53

life. Therefore phenomenology, the personal impression of reality, is shaped by the lifestyle of an individual. Phenomenology, therefore, has important consequences on self-esteem. Branden has suggested that self-esteem is something we give to ourselves; that is, we shape our self-esteem by the way we perceive reality and our perception of reality is in line with our lifestyle.

2.3.2 Public Victory

Loving is risky. To love is to be vulnerable. Giving your heart to someone ensures that it will be broken, pierced, wounded and made malleable. Give it anyway. If you give your heart to no one, it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable

– Stanislaus Kennedy

According to Covey (1990), highly effective people practice “Seven Habits” which are divided into “Private Victory” - be proactive; begin with end in mind; put first things first and “Public Victory” - think win/win; seek first to understand, then to be understood; synergize.³³ In discussing these victories, Covey suggests that for one to be highly effective, one should grow in a continuum from dependence to independence - Private Victory to interdependence - Public Victory. That is, Private Victory precedes Public Victory. In this section, Covey’s idea of *Public Victory* is taken on to show that it is one of the properties of self-esteem.

As you care less about what others think of you, you will care more about what others think of themselves and their worlds, including their relationship with you.

From dependence to interdependence: We cannot have a sense of interdependence, *Public Victory*, without a sense of independence, *Private Victory*. Before we seek others, we need to have a sense of our individuality. When Moses wanted to know the name of God for the first time, God’s introduction was “I am who I am.” We, too, as individuals are who we are. But who are we? Who am I? Who are you? These are questions the answers to which touch our individuality, the part in us that is not found in others, that is unique to us. It is because of this part, that each one of us is able to say, “I am independent.” When in reality one is able to say, “I am independent,” in a real sense of the words, then one has won the Private Victory.

According to Covey, Private Victory leads to a significant increase in self-confidence. He further clarifies that individuals with self-confidence [self-

³⁴ Ibid, p.61

esteem] know themselves in a more meaningful way – their nature, their deepest values, and their capacity to make a unique contribution. He also maintains that as self-confident individuals live their values, their sense of identity, integrity, control, and inner-directedness, maintains peace in their lives. Such people, Covey continues, define themselves not by other people's opinions but from within.

A person who has won *Private Victory* can go on to win *Public Victory*. When I am aware of myself; that is, aware of my gifts and talents, my strong and weak points; what I can and I can't do, when I am aware that I am who I am – only then am I able to embrace others in a loving way. I cannot give to others what I don't have, or what I am not aware that I have. Public Victory comes from a person's openness to other people and social interest. Public Victory results when a person moves from a self-centred position to another-centred stance. Covey has put it very well.

*As you care less about what others think of you, you will care more about what others think of themselves and their worlds, including their relationship with you. You will no longer build your emotional life on other people's weaknesses . . . As you open yourself to the habits of Public Victory, you will discover and unleash both the desire and the resources to heal and rebuild important relationships that have deteriorated, or even broken.*³⁴

The goal of psychotherapy is more than emotional adjustment; it is actually social adjustment. This requires the recognition and alteration of the basic assumptions and premises on which the individual functions.

Social adjustment: Public Victory also means social adjustment that brings satisfaction in one's life. Casper and Fishbein (2002) investigated whether job satisfaction and job success of people with mental illnesses are moderators of self-esteem. Sixty-five employed with a mean age 41 years and 170 unemployed with a mean age 41 years individuals with mental illnesses along with their work status and duration measures were combined in a single multiple regression analysis with self-esteem as the criterion. The results revealed that self-esteem varied with satisfaction and success with the work status and not with work status alone.

The findings above are consistent with Branden's concept of self-efficacy. When people feel competent as they face the challenges of life; when people feel satisfied with their contribution to others, their level of self-esteem increases. That is why Adlerian psychology maintains that one of the goals of therapy should be to help clients face with courage the chal-

³⁵ Dreikurs, (1973) p. 66

lenges of life by raising their level of social interest. “Consequently, the goal of psychotherapy is more than emotional adjustment; it is actually social adjustment. This requires the recognition and alteration of the basic assumptions and premises on which the individual functions”.³⁵

2.4 Summary

Since self-esteem has been defined in several ways to mean different things (Branden, 1992; Sorensen, 1998), chapter 2 of this book has been devoted to establishing an understanding of self-esteem. Branden (1994) and Sorensen’s explanations of self-esteem have been relied on. References to Covey and others have been made to expand on Branden’s and Sorensen’s approach to self-esteem.

Self-esteem can be referred to as the experience acquired since childhood through interacting with the environment. It is in the process of interacting with the environment that we build self-efficacy; the vital factor in facing the challenges of life. Self-esteem is not something we are born with, but it develops as we interact with the environment around us. It is important to note that we are not defined by circumstances, but we participate in shaping those circumstances.

As we engage ourselves with others by both receiving and contributing to others’ growth, we mature in self-efficacy; one component of self-esteem. Chapter 3 looks more deeply at the phenomenon of human society and how active participation enhances the concept of *social interest*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL WAY OF BEING

Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche Communities, inspired me when I heard him speak at a meeting in Chicago, in 1999. Vanier said, "The world is a dangerous place so we will succeed together as a family. Individualism will take us nowhere." Vanier was speaking against what he called "Western individualism," urging that we, as people of one world, can succeed if we work together making sure that no one is left behind. He confessed facing his own woundedness when he started living with handicapped people. He said he discovered that every human being is handicapped in one way or another. According to Vanier, knowing this truth, that we are all wounded and in need of each other binds us together.

Vanier was touching on the fundamental ideas that will be presented in this chapter. He was describing what Adler's followers refer to as "social interest." Adlerians believe that growth takes place in a social context; therefore, perceiving a person outside his or her social context is incomprehensible. Challenges are part of life and they may become problems depending on the individual's worldview and perception. Nevertheless, not all problems are social because some pertain to the individual. However, all problems can become social problems.³⁶ Adler stated, "In order to know how a person thinks, we have to examine the person's relationship to his fellow human beings We cannot comprehend the psychic activities without at the same time understanding those social relationships".³⁷

Society helps us to grow in that "all beings experience negative consequences when they ignore laws of nature. Social convention and society's laws have a force of their own as well. When understood and used wisely, social rules can be a powerful, positive method in helping people of all ages".³⁸ Therefore, Sweeney argues, social rules are for everyone. Vanier and Adlerians agree on one thing – that people succeed together. Indeed, experience shows that those with a high level of social interest are frequently psychologically healthy.

³⁶ Mosak & Maniaci (1999) p. 20

³⁷ Adler (1957) p. 34

³⁸ Sweeney (1998) p. xii

3.1 Definition of Social Interest

People who are in need – damaged, vulnerable and abused – are afraid of revealing themselves and opening up to those who are trying to help them. They need people who will listen to them, with all their wounds and needs. They need to sense that they are not being judged. They need people who will help them to rediscover their self-esteem, self-respect, pride, dignity and sense of empowerment – most of all they need acceptance
– Stanislaus Kennedy

Adler regarded human society as a primary concept in his psychology. For him, human society is not only important “for the development of the individual character, but also for the orientation of every single action and emotion in the life of a human being”.³⁹ The German term *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* was coined by Adler and was translated later by others as *social interest* or *social feeling*, implying *cooperation, responsibility, belonging, social cohesiveness, and empathy*. (Nikelly, 1971). These concepts are used as different levels of social interest. An individual who attains all five levels is said to have a high level of social interest.

3.1.1 Cooperation

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”
– Genesis 2:18

Three points are used to define cooperation: *contribution, support and reciprocity*. In this section, these points will be developed to demonstrate that they are part of the definition of social interest.

We are all “good enough”; we are not in this world to compete with others, but to give our contribution. We are all called to do our best; no more, no less.

Contribution: Useful contribution through democratic cooperation is at the heart of true significance and reason for high social interest, whereas low social interest is manifested in competition and a desire for personal superiority (Greever, et al., 1973). The difference between cooperation and competition is illustrated in a story by Susan Jeffers, heard from a cassette programme based on a her book, *End the Struggle and Dancing with Life*.

³⁹ Dreikurs, (1989) p. 1

Susan Jeffers and other speakers were about to give a talk on a subject before an audience. When she was about to speak and was being introduced to the audience, her husband whispered in her ear, "You will be the best." Susan acknowledges that in the past she would have liked to hear that she would be the best, but at that time, she says, she felt something was wrong with "You will be the best." She says that she felt uneasy as if she was competing with other speakers. Instinctively, she reported, she leaned back to her husband and said to him, "Next time say to me: 'you will be good enough.'"

Don't we all get nervous when we want to be the best, beating everyone? The truth is that we are all "good enough." We are not in this world to compete with others, but to give our contribution. Life is not about competing with others in order to find a champion. We are all called to do our best; no more, no less. Nobody possesses everything. Thus, in the "game" of life, nobody can claim to be a champion. If we all had the same amount of talents under the same circumstances, then we would have a fair competition. We have all been given a portion of something so that, with others, we can bring our portions together to form the whole. Whereas cooperation is a sign of high social interest, competitiveness signifies low social interest.

If we want to grow, working together with others is not an option, it is a necessity. There are things in us that are needed by others and there are things in others that we don't have, but are necessary for our growth.

Support: Corsini (1999) defined cooperation as "the working together of two or more units of a group in such a manner as to jointly produce a common result". According to Corsini, human infants start cooperative play as early as three years old. Cooperation is necessary for us to survive because none of us possesses everything. In cooperation we access what we don't have but is found in others. If we want to grow, working together with others is not an option, it is a necessity. There are things in us that are needed by others and there are things in others that we don't have, but are necessary for our growth. The example of a plate of food in the restaurant may be trivial but clarifies the point.

When you go to a restaurant to buy a plate of food, think about how many people worked hard for you to have that plate. Think about those who cultivated the food and those who made the machinery to cultivate the land. Maybe they had to irrigate the land. Think also about those who manufactured the irrigation machine. The food was transported from the farm. Someone manufactured a truck to transport the food. Maybe the food was brought from far and had to come by boat or by plane.

A pilot or a boat captain had to go to school in order to know how to transport your food. Someone built that school. A restaurant owner had to go to school to be taught how to run a restaurant. In the restaurant, you sat on furniture that was manufactured by someone who obtained the timber from the forest that was looked after by a forest officer.

As seen in the example above, one can go on and on narrating all the individuals who might have contributed toward your plate of food in a restaurant. Very importantly, you may not have a clue how to perform those services yourself. You can see how many people are needed for something as simple as a plate of food for you in a restaurant. What about other complex services, such as education, health services, etc.? It is an example of how cooperation is very important in people's lives; proving nobody can succeed alone.

After obtaining a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology, I thought about all the people who contributed to my success from the time I was born to the time I got that degree, starting with my parents. I would be foolish to think it was my success alone. Millions of people, from many generations back, contributed to my obtaining that degree, and my success is theirs too.

We are all called to give our contributions, no matter how insignificant they may appear in our eyes. We grow as we both give and receive from others.

Reciprocation: We are all called to give our contributions, no matter how insignificant they may appear in our eyes. We grow as we both give and receive from others. God created the world alone because he was almighty. However, He left some of the work for us to continue. We are not as almighty as He is, but, if we come together, we will achieve much more than one individual can accomplish. Therefore, cooperation with others is not just something we can engage in once in a while as we like, but a necessary condition for our growth and accomplishment. No individual, no nation - however powerful it may think itself to be - no group of individuals can grow alone.

Individuals, who suffer from mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety, isolate themselves from others because of the nature of their illnesses. It is this isolation that worsens the illness. That is why Adlerians believe that the major goal of psychotherapy should be to instill social interest, and in particular to promote cooperation. One of the reasons Tim's story in the previous chapter was a success story was because Tim had courage to go out there and look for employment. He was in the process of being

under disability benefits from the government but therapy talked him out of it, and he instead started seeking for employment.

Employment is one way of cooperating with others. One gives his or her services and, in return, one receives remuneration. In my opinion, the reason why unemployment can be devastating in any society is because without employment, members of society are denied an opportunity to share their talents, which is their right to contribute and to receive from others.

3.1.2 Responsibility

If I live by values I have accepted or adopted passively and unthinkingly, it is easy to imagine that they are just “my nature,” just “who I am”.

– Nathaniel Branden

Three points are covered in this section to highlight *responsibility* as another level of social interest. These points are: *reaching out*, *self-care and ownership*. They articulate that social interest takes into account caring for others and for myself, and owning my actions without blaming others or the environment. Social interest does not believe “the devil made me do it.”

As people of one world, we have the responsibility of working together to make sure nobody is left behind. A.A.s who give freely of their time and effort to help other alcoholics seldom have trouble preserving their own sobriety.

Reaching out: If we break up the word responsibility, we will get two words: *response* and *ability*. Responsibility implies that we have the ability to respond; therefore others can count on us. Cooperation is impossible without the ability to respond, especially when responding to our needs and the needs of others. The Adlerian theory, in general, regards social interest as a sense of caring and concern for the welfare of others that, ideally, continue to guide behaviour throughout life. Caring is considered essential for mental health (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). The best way for us to heal is to reach out to others, as Jean Vanier, who said that he discovered his own woundedness after living with the handicapped.

Vanier believes that the world is a dangerous place, and his advice is that the only way we can thrive in it is by being together and living as a family. He speaks against individualism, insisting that it will take us nowhere. As people of one world, we have the responsibility of working together to make sure nobody is left behind.

More insight on reaching out is provided in the answer to one of the questions in a booklet, 44 Questions, recovery, which asks: "Why is A.A. interested in problem drinkers?"

Members of A.A. have a selfish interest in offering a helping hand to other alcoholics who have not yet achieved sobriety. First, they know from experience that this type of activity helps them to stay sober. Their lives now have a great and compelling interest. Very likely, reminders of their own previous experience with alcohol help them to avoid the overconfidence that could lead to a relapse. Whatever the explanation, A.A.s who give freely of their time and effort to help other alcoholics seldom have trouble preserving their own sobriety.

A.A.s are anxious to help problem drinkers for a second reason: It gives them an opportunity to square their debt to those who helped them. It is the only practical way in which the individual's debt to A.A. can ever be repaid. The A.A. member knows that sobriety cannot be bought and that there is no long-term lease on it. The A.A. does know, however, that a new way of life without alcohol may be had simply for the asking, if it is honestly wanted and willingly shared with those who follow (Alcoholics Anonymous World services, Inc, p.14).

The best way to become aware of our own pain is by reaching out to those who are in pain.

We are all handicapped in one way or another, and knowing this truth binds us together.

Self-care: Just as Vanier discovered his own vulnerability as he got to know the handicapped people, the best way to become aware of our own pain is by reaching out to those who are in pain. We are all handicapped in one way or another, and knowing this truth, as Vanier encourages, binds us together.

While talking to a group of recovering drug users and telling them that they were lucky to have substances as their choice for their addiction, they looked at me as if they did not believe what they were hearing. We all suffer from an addiction of some sort. The majority of us don't seem to perceive ourselves as addicts of some kind simply because our addictions may be regarded by the society as acceptable, and we go through life suffering without seeking help.

As an example, it took me time to discover that I had problems with using the Internet. I couldn't start a day without browsing the internet. If I did not have access to the Internet that day, I would spend the whole morning restless until I could get access and spend a good number of minutes on the

web pages. I would then feel bad afterwards because I did not use the time doing what I had allocated that time for. There are those who are addicted to watching TV, some are addicted to driving, while others are addicted to falling in love – they can't live without the thrill of falling in love and so move from one lover to another. These are not really considered to be addictions by society, but they can cause as much emotional addiction syndrome as drugs or alcohol does. (This is not meant to minimize the effects of drugs and alcohol on people by putting them at the same level as being addicted to the Internet.) Emotionally, we may be affected at the same level, regardless the source of addiction. There are centres for treating alcohol and drug addictions, but none for problems such as Internet addiction. That is why I told recovering drug-using clients that they were lucky because they were able to seek help given the nature of their addiction.

Being responsible does not only entail being concerned with others, but also with ourselves; it means owning the way we interpret events in our life.

Ownership: Growth takes place in a social context; therefore, it is incomprehensible to perceive a person developing outside the social context. Challenges are part of life and they may become problems depending on the subjective interpretation of those challenges. Being responsible does not only entail being concerned with others, but also with ourselves. It means owning the way we interpret events in our life. Experience shows that nobody who manifests a high level of social interest becomes psychologically sick. Therefore, we are responsible for increasing the level of social interest both in us and in others.

In Adlerian psychology, the essential goal of therapy is to attain *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, which is considered to be a measure for psychological health. "Ideally, social interest is based on the desire to offer rather than to take, and on a concern for the interest of the primary group and finally of all mankind."⁴⁰ Indeed, Adler perceived *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* as "an innate potentiality that is developed or learned within the environment. The degree to which it is developed governs the way an individual moves toward self-significance".⁴¹ (Therefore, we all have a responsibility, not only of caring for others, but also for nurturing and developing in ourselves the *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.)

Commenting further, Stasio and Capron (1998) indicated that Adler's theory of personality was the first to place importance on responsibility,

⁴⁰ Nikelly (1971), p. 71

⁴¹ Greever et al (1973), p. 20

usefulness, and, above all, social relationships in life. They emphasized the idea that social interest should be developed in one's upbringing; a stance that remains a core component in Adler's system. An important aspect of social interest appears to be its predominantly selfless nature.

3.1.3 Belonging

Treat everybody right, remember life is a two way street. You might meet the same people on your way down that you met going up – Maya Angelou

Belonging is another level of social interest, which in this section is approached from two aspects: *Human family* and *human rights*. A person with high social interest views every human being as a “brother” or a “sister” with equal human rights.

It is about belonging to the human family. We all belong to each other; this is belonging that goes beyond cultures, skin colour, or creed.

Human family: Social interest refers not only to simple feelings of belonging to a certain group or class of people, but rather social interest is also concerned with “feeling with the whole.” Therefore, social interest “must certainly not be understood as an altruistic motivational force which would counterbalance egoistic urges”.⁴²

Social interest is about belonging to the human family. We all belong to each other; this belonging stretches beyond cultures, skin colour or creed. Because of social interest, we discover that we belong to a common humanity. The story below may clarify the point.

I was anxious on my first trip from Tanzania to the United States (US). I had heard stories about the US and its people. I was not sure about the US culture and how the people were going to receive me. My first experience was different from my expectations. I met people who cared about strangers, just as in my country. Contrary to what I had heard that in America each one is on his or her own, whenever I was lost I was shown the way. I discovered that Americans are just ordinary people, like other ordinary human beings I knew; struggling with the daily challenges of life such as seeking employment, paying the bills, searching for love and other everyday activities. I felt a sense of belonging because almost everything became familiar. After eight years living in the States, on my return to Tanzania, I thought about all the friends I had made during those

⁴² Adler, (1964), p. 41

years and how I would miss them. I thought about all the streets that had become my home, and how I had gotten used to all the rules of living there. This is proof that we belong to a common humanity. Wherever we go, we can find a home.

Any “social interest” that does not respect the rights and interest of others is not real social interest.

Human rights: One may argue that one cannot belong to the human family without some sense of belonging to a small entity, but real social interest is inclusive. Any “social interest” that does not respect the rights and interests of others is not real social interest. We all belong to the human family. It is this sense of belonging which makes people in one part of the world, far away, feel a desire to help others they have never met, simply because they are in need.

Of course, I am aware, for example, that I am a Tanzanian, and I value my country dearly because being a Tanzanian gives me a sense of identity and pride. However, if my sense of belonging to Tanzania causes me to alienate non-Tanzanians, then there will be something wrong with my Tanzanian identity. Any human activity without social interest is destructive.

3.1.4 Social Cohesiveness

It is the effective sharing of one's inner world and then the acceptance by others that seems of paramount importance.

— Irvin Yalom

According to Corsini (1999), there are three levels of group [social] cohesion: *connectedness*, *attractiveness*, and *emotional*. These are also essential in defining social interest.

Belonging can be celebrated only when one is connected to a specific group where one can express oneself freely.

Connectedness: Cohesion is “a tendency of successive or simultaneous acts to become connected”.⁴³ We have a natural tendency to be connected. We cannot live in isolation, and the best way to feel connected is when we feel a sense of belonging to a group. In the previous section, about the aspect of belonging to the human family, where all human beings, regardless of their culture, colour or belief, are viewed as brothers and sisters was discussed. In social cohesiveness we identify with a particular group, without losing

⁴³ Corsini, (1999) p. 19

our universal connectedness. Belonging can be celebrated only when one is connected to a specific group where one can express oneself freely. It is important to feel that we belong to humanity and that we are all brothers and sisters, but it is likewise important that we have specific groups where we can express our identity. It is in this specific group, such as in our family, that we learn skills of living in a larger society. In our families we learn to love and to care for others. Most importantly, we can love others only if we have experienced and received love from others. No one can love who has never been loved. We first experience this in our family.

There are other specific groups that we later belong to such as schools, religious groups, political parties and country. People think differently politically, psychologically or spiritually, etc. Nature has given us different groups so that all of us are accommodated according to our beliefs and convictions. It is healthy to have individual small groups with different views, and have a tendency to be connected. That is why people tend to seek out others who are like them. This is healthy in itself as long as by being together they are not claiming superiority over others.

For people to remain connected to a group, its rules have to attract them personally. Healthy social interest requires that we belong to groups where we feel peaceful and doing the things we enjoy doing.

Attractiveness: Another level of cohesion involves “the overall strength of the attractiveness of a group for its members”.⁴⁴ For people to remain connected to a group, its rules have to attract them personally. There is nowhere that this is truer than in religious groups. Major religious groups such as Christianity or Islam have several subgroups. For example, Christians started as one group of people with the same faith in Jesus, but as time went by, subgroups emerged. These subgroups were healthy events that happened in the history of Christianity.

The major break-up happened during the Protestant Reformation, the legacy of which today leaves us with several Christian churches. Some people view this as a negative event in Christian history. The same can be said of other religious groups such as Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, etc. Imagine what life would be like if we had one religion, unlike today where we have Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, etc. It is impossible for people to think in the same way and God is such a great mystery that not one institution can claim to have the whole truth about God. Instead of inter-religious fighting and conflicts, people of all religions

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 29

should come together, dialogue and share their experience of God. People should agree to be different.

I believe God has allowed different religious groups to provide us with varieties for us to choose from, where we can feel comfortable and peaceful. We are going to be attracted differently, depending on our backgrounds. That is how human nature works. Healthy social interest requires that we belong to groups where we feel peaceful and doing things we enjoy doing. Some people criticize the Catholic Church and feel that they can't stand some of the practices in the Catholic Church. That is fine for them. Others, on the other hand are very comfortable in the Catholic Church. They love and regard it as the best place for them to express their faith. We work and think differently. We all choose different groups so that our individual needs can be met. What has been said above about religious groups can be applied to any social group.

The earlier in life we are introduced to social groups, the stronger the emotional bonding becomes later in life.

Emotional level: Cohesion can also apply to “the emotional bond that holds the group together. Such bonds arise out of interactions among the members as well as mutual interests, activities, and purposes”.⁴⁵ The earlier in life we are introduced to social groups, the stronger the emotional bonding is later in life. We learn the rules of life very early from our parents or other caretakers who have the obligation to introduce the children early to social groups so as to help them learn the rules and other social skills early in life. It can be argued that parents or other caretakers, especially where religious groups are concerned, who claim they should leave their children to grow and choose for themselves where they want to belong hinder their children from learning the skills very early that are necessary for the development of social interest. By the time they are adults it is too late, and there is a high probability that the individual will be indifferent to societal activities. Indifference may not be a good thing. Isabella's story (not her real name) may clarify the point.

Isabella was 40 years old. She was a client who came to our centre complaining about panic attacks, bipolar disorder and a previous diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. During one of our sessions, Isabella was angry at her mother because when she was a child, she and her three siblings were not taken to church by her parents. Isabella thought that if her mother had created in them a habit of going to church, she would have known God early in her life. Isabella said she had tried several times to go to church but each time she experienced panic attacks and

⁴⁵ Corsini, (1999) p. 33

ran away. She reported being scared of people in her church. Isabella had no friends and she thought church would have been a good place for her to make friends. Isabella's former counsellor had introduced her to a church, thinking it would be an excellent place for Isabella to be in touch with people.

As parents and guardians teach their children a language and don't leave the children to choose their own language when they grow up, so should it be in other areas of life, such as career, religion, spirituality, etc. Early socialization helps children to develop social skills that are essential in creating emotional bonding in their social groups, which in turn increase the level of social interest.

3.1.5 Empathy

I have always believed that to be a freedom fighter one must suppress many of the personal feelings that make one feel like a separate individual rather than part of a mass movement.

— Nelson Mandela

Empathy is the ability to enter into another's world and experience it as he or she experiences it. Empathic understanding involves "wearing someone else's shoes." It is feeling with the heart of another, thinking with the mind of another, seeing with the eyes of another, etc. Empathy is not sympathy. While in sympathy, one imagines what one feels, and communicates to the other "I know what you feel"; in empathy one communicates to the other "I know how you feel." Two notions are used to explain the meaning of empathy: *another's heart*, and *good and evil*.

Adler described social feeling as to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, and to feel with the heart of another.

Another's heart: Adler (1964) described social feeling as "to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, and to feel with the heart of another".⁴⁶ Therefore, social interest requires a gift of empathy. According to Adler, empathy is an ability that must be developed and the only way to accomplish this is for an individual to grow in connection with others and feel oneself a part of the whole.⁴⁷ This is a crucial point which emphasizes that no one can grow alone, but growth comes as one is involved in the affairs of the world.

⁴⁶ Adler, (1964), p. 42

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 43

He or she must sense that not only the comforts of life belong to him or her, but also its discomforts. He or she must feel at home on this earth with all its advantages and disadvantages. This feeling at home is directly a part of social interest . . . Thus he or she is part of the whole, who proves himself or herself in correspondence with the community and useful to it.⁴⁸

The real world is made up of good and evil. If we are busy all the time trying to uproot evil, we will be left with no time to nurture the goodness that also exists in us, in others, and in our world.

Good and evil: To be in line with Adler in the quotation above, empathy goes hand in hand with acceptance of oneself, others and the world. Acceptance of oneself involves accepting everything about oneself with all one's strong and weak points. It is knowing that one is not perfect, and that one will never be perfect. Knowing this truth will simplify one's empathic attitude toward others.

A religious Sister friend of mine once told me that since she became a Sister she has been trying very hard not to be intimately involved with men, because that would go against her religious commitment. She stated that she did not understand why some Sisters broke the vow of chastity. She said she used to be furious with such Sisters until one day it happened to her. Reflecting on the incident, she believes her "falling" was a "divine intervention" to rescue her from her pride! She said God allowed it to happen so as to teach her: "it is not in our power alone we succeed in our commitments." She said that after coming face-to-face with her own weakness she could feel empathy toward those Sisters who could not keep their vow of chastity.

The reason why the Master declared, "The Son of Man did not come to judge and condemn anyone but to save all" can be because he himself became one of us and had one-hundred percent knowledge of what it means to be human. Without accepting me as I am, it will be very hard to empathically accept others as they are.

In Adler's quotation above, it is important to note his point that "he or she must feel at home on this earth with all its advantages and disadvantages." Unfortunately, for us who are not happy with this world, we have only one world. There is no way we can go to live on another planet and so we are bound to accept our mother earth – with its good and evil. It is on this planet where we must learn to be empathic.

⁴⁸ Adler, (1964), p. 43

Our life is not just evil, there is also good. There are some people who believe that we live in the most evil period of all human history. They go on to predict that God is very angry because of today's evil and so they predict that the end of the world is near. There is a reason which can allow for argument against this belief. Evil has been with us since time immemorial and it can not be a fact that there is more evil now than in any other period in history. I think we live in a mostly civilized world, and as more time passes by, the world will become even more civilized than today. We should learn to be happy in the world we have, which has both good and evil. The Master's advice is found in the parable below.

A man sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said, "Master did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?" He answered, "An enemy has done this." His slaves said to him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" He replied, "No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13: 24–30).

The real world is made up of good and evil. If we are busy all the time trying to uproot evil, we will be left with no time to nurture the goodness that also exists in us, in others and in our world. In fact, reading between the lines, the parable seems to be saying that evil is necessary for us to grow and become strong. Imagine living in a world in which there is only goodness, where there is no anxiety, no sickness, no hatred, no death, etc. How can we know true love without experiencing some hatred? How can we know life without being confronted with the questions of death? How can we feel the joy of good health if we have never experienced sickness? How can we enjoy the peace in our heart if we have never experienced restlessness and anxiety? Looking back, I think I have become stronger and wiser because of the crises and weaknesses I have encountered in my life. The ultimate end of being empathic is to nurture goodness in others and in us; thus we grow in social interest.

Concluding, this section has dealt with a leading concept in Adlerian psychology; human society, which is considered important for the growth and organization of human life. Any person's development and growth level is directly proportional to the level of the person's involvement in the society. This level of involvement is what is known as social interest.

Adler coined the German term, *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, to express a person's involvement with the society. This term was translated later into English

as social interest or social feeling, implying *cooperation, responsibility, belonging, social cohesiveness, and empathy*. This whole section is focused on explaining the aforementioned terms, describing them as different levels of social interest. A person who lives in cooperation with others, with a sense of responsibility and empathy for others; who feels some sense of belonging to humanity, with social cohesiveness has a high level of social interest.

3.2 Social Interest and Common Sense

Now the whole earth had one language and few words . . . Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves . . . And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower . . . And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech".

– Genesis 11: 1–7

Although the story above from the Book of Genesis may sound far-fetched because of the conclusions to be made from it, has inspired most ideas in this section. The story can be said to be trying to explain how diversity came about. The story is attributing the cause of diversity in languages to God who used it as a way to stop humans from making themselves into something they were not. They had abused the power of speaking a common language. With a common language, God acknowledges that “nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them”. In other words, nothing would be impossible when people worked as one people, united by a common language. Since they were abusing the power by wanting to build a tower to reach God, making a name for themselves, God frustrated their ambition by confusing their speech so that they could not understand each other.

This section notes the power that emerges when people think in the same way. This is the thinking that goes beyond the usage of words. It is written in the story that “the whole earth had one language and few words.” One is led to believe that this “language” remained even after the emergence of different languages. This “language” will be referred to as *common sense* in this section. It is a certain way of thinking that is common to all human beings.

With common sense, individuals are capable of social interest and the power that comes from social interest. Although the people in the story above abused

the power of common sense, it is an important aspect of human living. Social interest brings people together, and according to Vanier, only when they are together can people really succeed. Three notions will be used to illustrate the aspects of common sense and show how it is closely related to social interest. These aspects in question are: *reason, uniqueness, and principles*.

3.2.1 Reason

Everything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

– Victor Frankl

In describing reason, the notions of *reason and intelligence, communality* and *truth* will be used to explain the aspect of *reason* as an aspect of common sense.

In using common sense, we know what the general opinion is and what the useful thing to do is; in using private logic, we follow our own biased, idiosyncratic thinking, which may not have much to do with common sense.

Reason and intelligence: In order to understand how social interest is intimately connected with common sense, let us begin by looking at the difference between reason and intelligence. To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, and to feel with the heart of another (Adler, 1964), requires reasoning. Corsini (1999) defines reason as “An intellectual process involved in considering the totality of a situation.” Totality involves considering others’ points of view on the situation, rather than being enveloped only in our private biased logic. Adler made a distinction between reason and intelligence, the distinction I consider crucial in understanding the meaning of common sense and social interest.

In his writings, Adler distinguished *reason*, which he also referred to as “common sense,” from “*private intelligence*.” He defined common sense “as all those forms of expression and as the content of all behavior, which we find beneficial to the community”.⁴⁹ Private intelligence refers to the content of thinking of an individual that is not shared by others. Mosak and Maniaci (1999) stated this differently: “In using common sense, we know what the general opinion is and what the useful thing to do is;

⁴⁹ Adler, (1956), p.149

in using private logic, we follow our own biased, idiosyncratic thinking, which may not have much to do with common sense”.⁵⁰

If people of the world commit to the common sense, by moving out of their small circles established in culture lines, this world would be more inclusive and a peaceful place in which to live.

Commonality: Common sense can be accessed if we use our reason. For example, common sense helps in forming friendships. In relationships and friendships, we discover commonality with others, and that is why we become attracted to them. Common sense is about the truth as we all see it together. When people go to school, they read books, attend lectures, etc., searching for this truth that we share in common. Certainly, if the people of the world commit to common sense by moving out of their small circles established by culture lines, this world would be a more inclusive and a more peaceful place in which to live.

Conflicts surface because people give more emphasis to differences that are a product of private intelligence than to similarities that are accessed by reason. When we fail to see that, in spite of external differences, we are all brothers and sisters with a common purpose of living our life together, the results are conflicts. Whether we are black or white, Palestinian or Israeli, Hutu or Tutsi, Sunni or Shiite, Catholic or Protestant, we all have red blood inside our bodies. After we have been dead for a certain period of time, unless we use DNA, we cannot be identified by those characteristics we use to divide ourselves when we are alive. In our graves, to put it bluntly, we all look the same, just grey bones.

As people with common sense and common destiny we are bound to live together. In this togetherness we embrace the joys and discomfort, the anguish and pleasures, the richness and poverty of others to make them our own. True peace will emerge if we come out of our limiting circles of cultures to see ourselves in *every* human being we meet.

My stay in the United States helped me to discover that there were more things that unite us as people than things that divide us. Some people have asked me why I studied psychology in America where the culture is different from my own and different from the culture where I will be practicing. For example, they wondered how I would be using diagnoses from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) developed in American culture, and then applying them to my own culture. I believe that mental illness is the result of violating common sense. Therefore, there are some common elements, not only in mental illness but in illnesses

⁵⁰ Mosak & Maniaci , p. 121

in general. When I listen to clients describe their symptoms, I discover they are similar across cultural boundaries. For example, depressed clients, regardless of their cultures, present similar symptoms such as depressed mood, diminished interests, weight loss or weight gain, insomnia or hypersomnia, loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, etc. This is not to say cultural factors shouldn't be considered when dealing with clients.

Common sense is the truth as we see it together; life presents itself in a common way, and we shouldn't let cultural biases prevent us from relating with those who are different from us.

Truth: This should not be seen as a philosophical argument about truth. Truth here is referred as “a correspondence of a judgment or thought with an actual occurrence” (Corsini, 1999). Something may be accurate if all of us are seeing the same thing. It doesn't mean it is the truth in itself, but, because we all see that way, we take it as the truth. The concept of God may clarify the argument. Of all the people who are still living, nobody knows what God looks like, but we all seem to have some similar experiences of God, and we have come up with a general picture of God that we all agree on. That is why we have religious groups worshiping God in the same way, because they share the same experience of God.

Common sense is the truth as we see it together. Life presents itself in a common way, and we shouldn't let cultural biases prevent us from relating with those who are different from us. As mentioned earlier, there are many more things that unite us than there are things that divide us. There is a certain oneness that is found in humanity, and if we allow ourselves to access this oneness, there can be no hatred among peoples. We have a saying in Swahili that *ukitaka kumuua nyani, usimwangelie machoni* (if you want to kill a baboon, don't look in its eyes). When, without bias, we look someone in his or her eyes we see ourselves; there is something that is common in all of us that shows through our eyes. The following section tackles the aspect of uniqueness in all of us, and how it helps us to relate with others.

3.2.2 Uniqueness

Unfortunately, our outside packaging counts for far more than it really should. Often, when we don't live up to the world's expectations of how we should look or behave, we fall victim to a vicious circle of self-loathing and denial that can be difficult to escape from unscathed.

— Sara Ban Breathnach

The best way to access the common sense in us is to commit to what is intimate in us; that is, to access our uniqueness, although it may sound paradoxical to say that what is unique in me is what I share with others. If I want to discover the common sense, I should search for my true self. When I remove all the pretense and imitations of what I think I should be, I discover my true self. Actually, the characteristics of my true self are the same shared by the “true selves” of others. When we discover our individuality, it becomes possible for us to enter into a relationship with another, because the other will find in us what is truly human. In this section, the notions of *image of God*, *right place* and *psychological health* are used to highlight the meaning of uniqueness as an aspect of common sense.

For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. The woman was fascinated by the idea of being like God.

Image of God: Christians believe that God assumed human nature in order to show human beings what they truly are. It is when human beings enter into themselves that they discover that they are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, Jesus came to redeem that image from the corruption of sin. Whether we are Christian or not, or even whether we believe in God or not, let's use this Christian belief to understand the notion of social interest.

Social interest is possible because there is something in common that all human beings share; something that goes beyond all cultures, all languages and all races. This something predates the history of “sin,” when human beings knew where they belonged, and where God belonged. In the book of Genesis, we are told: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘you will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:4-5). The woman was fascinated by the idea of being like God. What the woman did not realize was that she was made in the image and likeness of God; therefore, there was no need to eat the fruit. We don't have to do anything to discover the image of God. We just need to be who we were meant to be. What is truly unique to us is the image of God in us.

The raising of social interest of a person involves creating a condition that enables a person to find his or her right place in the society

Right place: The story of human beings building a tower at the beginning of this section provides an excellent image that gives further insight

into the meaning of social interest and common sense. God confused the humans' speech because of their ill-advised ambition of wanting to be like God. God could not allow that "insanity" to happen. The greatest insanity of all is for humans to want to be like God; it is the fantasy of all fantasies because it is impossible to be like God.

Mental illnesses are the results of wanting to become other than oneself; to become other than what one was meant to be. My definition of mental illness entails "wishing" to become other than what one was meant to be. The result of that wishing is more isolation and alienation from others, where one no longer speaks a "common language" as others. The road to sanity involves working on oneself so that one speaks a "common language" as others, without putting oneself above or below what one's creator meant him or her to be; finding the right place.

Psychogenic illnesses are the result of individuals' ignoring or excusing themselves from using common sense because common sense draws them to where they were meant to be

Psychological health: The raising of social interest in a person involves creating a condition that enables that person to discover his or her right place in society. Our mental health depends on the position we occupy in the society – if we place ourselves below or above where we were meant to be, the result will be mental illnesses.

In order for individuals to co-operate with others, or to be responsible and feel a sense of belonging and empathy, they need to possess common sense. Common sense is meant to unite people and help them to stay healthy. When individuals use private logic only and disregard common sense, growth is the first casualty. Dreikurs (1973) puts it more sternly, suggesting that psychogenic illnesses are the result of individuals' ignoring or excusing themselves from using common sense, because common sense draws them to where they were meant to be. Someone asked me, "How do I know where I was meant to be?" How is that measured? I am where I was meant to be when I feel my life is full of meaning; when I feel fulfilled and enjoying what I am doing. The meaning in one's life is experienced when one has social interest. In other words, when one lives in cooperation with others, has a sense of responsibility and belonging, and when one has empathy.

There is a significant difference in the degree of social interest between people who are inclined to use private logic and those who are inclined to use common sense. For example, Marcus, et al. (1999) compared early recollections of 50 counselors and 50 mentally ill patients all aged 22–39 years, to determine if significant differences existed between the two groups.

As was expected, counsellors had early recollections that reflected high social interest. Mentally ill patients had themes consistent with low social interest. Another aspect of common sense, *principles* will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.3 Principles

The root of our self-esteem is not our achievements but those internally generated practices that, among other things, make it possible for us to achieve.

– Nathaniel Branden

Two notions, *common elements* and *community feeling*, are used to describe principles as constitutive elements of common sense and social interest.

Social interest consists of principles that enable all people to manage to live together. Principles are a part of most every major enduring religion as well as enduring social philosophies and ethical systems.

Common elements: As hinted briefly earlier, social interest is the “common sense” that goes beyond all cultures. To use the image of the story of people building the tower, It can be assumed that when God scattered the people by bringing in differences in speech among them, not everything was confused. There were some common elements that remained which continued uniting them. Those are the elements being referred to when using the words *social interest* or *common sense*. One’s social feeling (implying cooperation, responsibility, belonging, social cohesiveness, and empathy) causes one to act beyond one’s own cultural needs and embrace the whole of humanity.

Social interest goes further than a particular culture, although it is, and it has to be, developed or learned within a culture. A person with high social interest demonstrates high social interest regardless of where he or she finds himself or herself. Such a person can see with the eyes of another; can hear with the ears of another; and can feel with heart of another”.⁵¹ Social interest consists of principles that enable all people to manage to live together; that is, to live in cooperation, in responsibility with each other, feel a sense of belonging and social cohesiveness, and have empathy for one another. Examples of these principles are fairness, integrity, honesty, human dignity, service, excellence, and growth (Covey, 1990). These principles function regardless of culture, religion or race, as Covey explains below.

⁵¹ Adler, (1964), p. 42

*Principles are a part of most every major enduring religion as well as enduring social philosophies and ethical systems. They are self-evident and can easily be validated by any individual. It's almost as if these principles or natural laws are part of the human condition, part of the human consciousness, part of the human conscience. They seem to exist in all human beings, regardless of social conditioning and loyalty to them, even though they might be submerged or numbed by such conditions or disloyalty.*⁵²

The feeling that we own this planet and are responsible for it not only now, but in the future, after we are gone, is a part of community feeling.

Community feeling: Because of the common elements in us, we feel bound to live with each other. As Mosak and Maniacci (1999) have described, social interest is “a sense of caring and concern for the welfare of others that, ideally, continues to guide behaviour throughout life”.⁵³ A person with a high level of social interest thinks beyond himself or herself. He or she takes into account those who will be around on this earth, even after he or she is long gone. “The feeling that we own this planet and are responsible for it not only now, but in the future, after we are gone, is a part of community feeling”⁵⁴ I assume it is this feeling that drives freedom fighters, like Nelson Mandela and others, who gave up their own lives so that others can live in freedom. Mandela (1995) himself supports this point, “I have always believed that to be a freedom fighter one must suppress many of the personal feelings that make one feel like a separate individual rather than part of a mass movement. One is fighting for the liberation of millions of people, not the glory of one individual.”⁵⁵

In summary, three aspects: *reason*, *uniqueness* and *principles* have been used to explain the relationship between social interest and common sense. Common sense has been looked at as a certain way of thinking and behaving that is common to all human beings, and is vital for possessing social interest. Social interest brings people together, and only together can people really succeed.

In describing reason as an aspect of common sense, the definition of Corsini (1999) who defined reason as an intellectual process involved in considering the totality of a situation was adopted. Totality refers to the point of view of collective thinking as opposed to private logic. Common sense

⁵² Covey, (1990), p. 34

⁵³ Mosak & Maniacci, p. 114

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Mandela, N,(1995), p. 228

opens us to the general opinion and useful actions. While private logic follows in the line of our own biased, idiosyncratic thinking, common sense is the truth as we see it together.

Uniqueness refers to what is most intimately distinctive to an individual. It can be argued that what is most unique to a person is in fact that which a person shares with others – common sense. It is because of the elements of common sense that we are able to engage with others in different tasks of life. For one to discover common sense, one should search for one's true self.

Principles are natural laws that are part of the human consciousness. They exist in all human beings, regardless of social conditioning. One's social interest causes one to act beyond one's own cultural conditioning and embrace the whole of humanity. Social interest consists of principles that enable all people to manage to live together. These principles include: fairness, integrity, honesty, human dignity, service, excellence and growth (Covey, 1989). The common elements in us call us to realize that we are responsible for each other, not only now but in the future, long after we are gone.

More insights into the meaning of social interest can be gained from studying the personality types. Adler identified four different types of individuals according to their attitudes toward the problems in life: *the ruling type*, *the getting type*, *the avoiding type* and *the useful type* (Kopp, 1986). The ruling type is out to dominate the world; the getting type leans on others; the avoiding type seeks shortcuts around problems; and the useful type struggles to solve life's problems in a cooperative relationship. In the following section, a deeper explanation of the personality types and their relationship to social interest will be given.

3.3 Personality Types and Social Interest

A poignant way of understanding psychological numbing is to see what we do in wartime situations. We create "the enemy." We can't drop bombs on human beings; but we can drop bombs on the enemy. We have to numb ourselves to the fact that we are killing real human beings who hurt and who want to live and love, just as we do. Psychological numbing creates apathy. It is not that we don't care. It is that we can't face the pain of caring. When we turn away from the homeless, or the aged, or the handicapped, for example, we are turning away from our own pain, our fears. We all do this but we have to understand that there is room in our lives for both the pain and the joy. In fact, without acknowledging the pain, there can be no joy

– Susan Jeffers

Earlier, in Chapter 2, *lifestyle* was defined as a pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that is unique to a person and represents the context in which a person's behaviour has to be considered. The lifestyle constitutes the personality of the person. The lifestyle is in place very early in a person's life as a child negotiates his or her way in the environment. As remarked earlier, since a child's nervous system at the formation of a lifestyle is still immature, there is a high possibility early in a child's life, of forming distorted perceptions of self, others and the world. On the other hand, if the child is well nurtured and receives appropriate guidance from caretakers, there is a high possibility of forming correct perceptions of self, others and the world.

A personality type has its major foundation during a person's lifestyle formation years, since at that time a person develops predictable themes that remain unchanged throughout a person's life. Adler (1935) identified four personality types: the ideal or useful type, the getting type, the ruling type, and the avoiding type. He considered the *ideal* type to belong to individuals who are interested in the welfare of others and have a high amount of social interest. The other three are destructive of the individual. The *getters'* primary orientation is to lean on others and subject them to their service. Their main theme is "what can you do for me?" The *rulers* seek to dominate others and control them, while the *avoiders* move away or take shortcuts to challenges and shun demands. In this section, these types will be explored and grouped as *useless* and *useful* personality types. How social interest manifests itself in these types is also explored.

3.3.1 Useless Personality Types

As I was boarding a plane I saw that the pilot was black. I had never seen a black pilot before, and the instant I did, I had to quell my panic. How could a black man fly an airplane? But a moment later I caught myself: I had fallen into the apartheid mindset, thinking Africans were inferior and that flying was a white man's job
– Nelson Mandela

Most psychologically sick individuals come from the ruling, the getting and the avoiding types which in this section will be called useless personality types. These are personality types that seek to manipulate, rule and get from others without giving back in return. They also avoid problems and responsibility, and shun demands. Overall, these individuals are uncooperative and lack social interest (Kopp, 1986). A detailed description of each of the useless personality types is beyond the scope of this section.

Reflections from Manaster & Richardson (1992) and Nikelly (2000) may help us glimpse how the characteristics of the ruling, getting and avoiding types manifest themselves in our modern life. These types will not be explored individually, but the following words have been selected to be used as concepts that demonstrate common characteristics found in useless personality types.

1. *Prejudice*
2. *Exaggerated autonomy*
3. *Poverty*

Prejudice and racism are conceptualized as a result of a trans-cultural psychological craving to feel superior to or better than one's fellow beings. The desire for status diminishes with the growth of social interest.

Prejudice: Corsini (1999) defines prejudice as “a persistently held attitude toward a certain group or individuals, more often negative than positive, formed in advance of sufficient evidence.” Usually, prejudices that are formed early in one’s life are very hard to remove. We have all experienced prejudices either as victims or as victimizing agents. Nelson Mandela, in the quotation above, fell victim himself to prejudice. Under the system of apartheid, he became prejudiced against black pilots.

Prejudice is a major threat to social interest. Joubert (1998) examined the relationship between narcissism, need for power and social interest among undergraduate students. There was a significant positive correlation between measures of narcissism and need for power. Neither narcissism nor the need for power measure correlated significantly with social interest. Normally, narcissistic individuals have a grandiose sense of self-importance, such as exaggerating achievements and talents. They also expect to be recognized as superior without tangible achievements. They also tend to exploit others, lack empathy and are usually arrogant. All these are antithesis of social interest and are major characteristics of prejudiced individuals.

Hanna (1998) maintained that the desire for status is a factor that may play a major role in the dynamics of prejudice and racism. She noted that in the context of the writings of Adler and of her own experiences, prejudice and racism are conceptualized as a result of a trans-cultural psychological craving to feel superior to or better than one’s fellow beings. She noticed that the desire for status diminishes with the growth of community feeling, social interest and empathy. Hanna concluded that Adler’s perspective provides a framework for a powerful multicultural view of mental health and human harmony that deserves wider consideration.

The marketing orientation that has emerged in contemporary society, emphasizing exaggerated human autonomy . . . is a real threat to the social interest . . . orienting people . . . to the acquisition of goods, or power for their own sake beyond any reasonable limits, and by insensitivity to the common good, social justice, and the rights of other people.

Exaggerated autonomy: Autonomy is a good quality that should be acquired early in the child's development. According to Erik Erikson (1963), autonomy versus shame and doubt is one of the crises that a child has to resolve early in life. When they are toddlers, children become aware of their individuality. That is, they acquire a sense of being independent from their parents. At this stage, through experience, they discover that their parents don't know everything and they are not the most powerful in the world. Therefore, children start exploring things on their own; they learn to say no. From this stage, children may either emerge with a sense of healthy independence or may develop an exaggerated sense of shame and self-doubt. Parental guidance is very much needed at this stage for the child to develop authentic independence and autonomy. "Autonomy refers to the ability to behave independently and to perform actions on one's own" (Newman & Newman, 1995). The development of this ability without an accompanying growth of social interest leads to useless personality types.

In their article, *Greed, Psychopathology, and Social Interest*, Manaster and Richardson, (1992) argue that the marketing orientation that has emerged in contemporary society, emphasizing exaggerated human autonomy and prowess, is a real threat to the social interest. They state that this marketing approach is orienting people to "Calculated greed, the acquisition of goods, status, or power for their own sake beyond any reasonable limits, and by insensitivity to the common good, social justice, and the rights of other people".⁵⁶ They also emphasize that this modern living is more and more "creating an emptiness, which is due to the fading of communal forms and beliefs. The manifestation of this emptiness is noticed in the form of low self-esteem, value confusion, eating disorders, drug abuse, and chronic consumerism".⁵⁷

Unrestricted globalization creates economic wealth for the few but leaves millions in poor quality of life, emphasizes profit over people, and undermines social interest.

Poverty: Poverty in our world can be viewed as a sign of a failure to apply principles of social interest. If all human beings were to faithfully and

⁵⁶ Manaster & Richardson, p. 261

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 266

honestly live out their social interest, there could be no poverty in the world! The problem is not that there are not enough resources for all, but some people possess more than they need. It doesn't cease to amaze me when I see poor people in the streets of American cities. Should there be poor people in the U.S.A., let alone in the world? Poverty stresses people, and if we don't change the system that continues to create more poor people, world peace will be threatened. Stressed people get discouraged very easily and have no motivation to nurture their social interest, thus they don't care about anything. Rich people and industrialized countries have a moral responsibility, for their own comfort and safety, to make sure that all human beings lead decent lives. If this is not done, social interest will be threatened.

Nikelly (2000), in his article, *Globalization and community feeling: Are they compatible?* argued that growing economic globalization stresses individual enrichment at the expense of social interest. He contended that unrestricted globalization creates economic wealth for the few but leaves millions in poor quality of life. It also emphasizes profit over people and undermines social interest. He suggested that systems that promote social cohesion, human solidarity and community life are more superior than those that encourage individualism and competition, which further leads to economic domination and class exploitation.

Nikelly proposed that mental health professionals should be active in adopting ways that help clients, educational institutions and civic organizations liberate themselves from goals that diminish social interest. Nikelly concluded that researchers, educators and therapists cannot divorce themselves from political involvement that aims to create a just society that is based on a moral economic system, or from educational endeavors that promote holistic and participatory values.

3.3.2 Useful Personality Types

All men, even the most seemingly cold-blooded, have a core of decency, and if their heart is touched, they are capable of changing

— Nelson Mandela

The useful personality type is considered to be the ideal, which is typical of high social interest. Individuals who are interested in the growth and welfare of others belong to this type. In this section, three characteristics, *win/win*, *intimacy* and *participation* will be discussed as examples of qualities found in individuals with the useful personality type. Note that these qualities are similar to those found in individuals with high social interest as mentioned earlier.

Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions.

Win/Win: In contrast to the useless personality types described above, the fourth type (the useful personality type) comprises individuals who seek cooperation in what can be compared with Covey's (1990) "Win/Win" paradigm. According to Covey, "Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interaction. Win/Win means that agreements of solutions are mutually satisfying . . . Win/Win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive arena".⁵⁸

A person with a *useful personality type* pursues the goal of cooperation and strives to successfully fulfill the tasks of life. Dinter (2000) has proven this to be true in his study in which he examined lifestyle patterns that relate to the feeling of self-efficacy among college students between ages of 18 and 54. The results of his study indicate that students with a strong sense of belonging, social interest and strong desires to strive for perfection exhibit higher general self-efficacy than those without those characteristics.

In a "Win/Win" paradigm, individuals strive to succeed in whatever they undertake, while at the same time striving to make sure others also succeed. They see life as not being a win/lose but a win/win – "I win you win, you win I win." They know that one cannot make it alone but, in cooperation with others, and that prosperity and growth for all can be possible. Win/Win is the notion that I shouldn't be selfish, but open myself up to the successes of others. This is what the Master meant when He said, "There is no greater love than for a person to lay down one's life for another." Individuals with high social interest automatically seek to care for the welfare of others. They see the world as being one big family and everyone in it as a brother or a sister.

Intimacy is the ability to experience an open, supportive, tender relationship with another person without fear of losing one's own identity in the process.

Intimacy: For Corsini (1999), intimacy is "a feeling or attitude characterized by complete emotional sharing with another." Newman & Newman (1995) also defined intimacy "as the ability to experience an open, supportive, tender relationship with another person without fear of losing one's own identity in the process".⁵⁹ These two definitions will be used to refer to intimacy in the following discussion.

⁵⁸ Covey, (1990), p. 207

⁵⁹ Newman & Newman, (1995), p. 552

People grow as they feel at home with others. Isolation can be a source of much stress and problems as some studies have revealed. For example, Miranda and Umhoefer (1998) examined differences in depression and social interest between three groups of Latinos in dissimilar acculturation stages: low-acculturation, bicultural and high-acculturation. Results revealed significant differences in social interest and depression between the three groups, with bicultural Latinos obtaining significantly higher scores on social interest and lower scores on depression when compared to the high and low acculturation level groups. This result suggests that biculturality is the stage of acculturation that is least harmful to Latinos' mental health and the ability to feel at home in a host culture.

The study above revealed a very important phenomenon in the life of people – closeness. In therapy with clients, I encourage them to seek friends. Some object, claiming they prefer being alone because they cannot stand being irked. Bill (not a real name), one of the clients, said that when he is around people he engages in arguments which, he said, lead to no peace. As a result, he reported that his major hobbies were hunting or fishing alone. Bill claimed he had no friends at all.

There are a few who agree with the idea of seeking friends and then plan together how to proceed. A good example is Sophia (not her real name).

Sophia was a 33-year-old kindergarten teacher, who came to me complaining about depression. Sophia claimed that because of depression she had lost several jobs. She was frequently fired because she used to skip work due to "lack of energy" and took naps while at work. As an only child, Sophia reported having no friends and spending most of her time playing alone. Since she was a Catholic and said that although she felt she had no energy to go to church, she liked going to church. I proposed she attend church with the hope of making friends. She agreed to go to church every Sunday, where she was to be an active member. This was a strategy for enabling her to get close to people. After a week, Sophia found a woman friend. They visited each other at home and went to movies together. Eventually, her depression got better and she was able to retain her job. Five months later, she fell in love with a man, a church member and they got married. She stated that this was her first love; she had been single before that.

Individuals make themselves known to their intimate partners. Whenever they have something going on in their life, they share their experience. They don't keep issues inside because they know those issues will come out later in uglier ways such as depression, anxiety, etc. The best way to become intimate with someone is to share with them your goals, feelings, dreams – anything, without fear of rejection. Life requires that we be close

to some individuals. There are those who claim to love everyone in the same way; who shun exclusive friendships. Trying to be close to all is equal to not being close to anyone. Any type of lifestyle that discourages close relationships and intimacy should be avoided. Being close to people is our birthright because from the beginning God saw that “it is not good that the man should be alone”. (Genesis, 2:18).

Some may be wondering, “What is he getting at, because he himself is a celibate Catholic Priest?” Barbara Newman and Philip Newman (1995), who are husband and wife, pointed out that, “although intimacy is generally established within the context of the marriage relationship, marriage itself does not automatically produce intimacy”.⁶⁰ I have met a lot of married people who are not intimate. For example, a friend of mine disclosed that she had been married to her husband for more than 40 years and they had spent half of that time as, what she called, “living singles.” She meant, “There was nothing going on between us.” Although they lived in the same house, she disclosed that each had his or her own bedroom.

Newman & Newman (1995) provide an excellent description of intimacy.

*An intimate relationship has both cognitive and affective components. The partners in such a relationship are able to understand each other's point of view. They usually experience a sense of confidence and mutual regard that reflects their respect as well as their affection for each other. Intimacy in a relationship supports independent judgments by each member of the dyad. An intimate relationship permits the disclosure of personal feelings as well as the sharing and developing of ideas and plans . . . there is mutual enrichment in intimate interactions.*⁶¹

This kind of intimacy is not only important but also necessary for the development of social interest. Within those parameters, any human being can enter into intimacy; yes, even a religious celibate. Intimacy is not only good for everybody but also highly recommended.

One of the best ways to participate in life is to develop a hobby that involves the participation of other people.

Participation: Participation in this case means interpersonal involvement that brings mutual influence and enjoyment among the members involved. Participation is another key ingredient for the development of social interest. The useful personality types tend to engage themselves in life, participating in such activities as social or spiritual. The image of children may

⁶⁰ Newman, B, & Newman P, (1995), p. 255

⁶¹ Ibid

shed some insight into the understanding of participation. Before children start formal education at school, there are other important things in life that they learn just by participation. One of them is learning a language.

I remember going to school to learn French. It took me a year before I could engage in real conversation with French speakers. I also paid a lot of money for teachers and other materials such as books, cassettes, etc. Children don't need all these when learning a language. They just participate; they listen and imitate, and consequently they reproduce everything exactly as they hear and see those around them performing. Unfortunately, at some stage of our growing up, we tend to lose this capacity of learning and absorbing things like children do. When I was learning French, I was wondering, "Why can't I do it like children?" Just go and live with people who speak French and leave the rest to nature.

Children also learn about the details of their culture simply by observing and imitating others. Why can't we adults do the same? Children learn a great deal about life as they observe what adults do, and then try it out themselves as they interact with peers in a playful way. The Master proposed that we adults should do the same. *Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it (Mark 10: 14–15).*

One of the best ways to participate in life is to develop a hobby that involves the participation of other people. A hobby is an activity that someone does for the sake of enjoyment. Children learn by playing and they enjoy what they do. Nobody gets psychologically sick who participates in doing what one enjoys. We need to play like children, and doing what one enjoys is one form of play. The economic difficulties of today have denied us the luxury of doing what we want. Many of us get into jobs not for the sake of enjoying them but because we need money and those jobs happen to be the best opportunities available. If we find ourselves in such situations, I propose, for the sake of our psychological health and the development of our social interest, we find activities we enjoy and volunteer our services.

Gilman (2001) assessed the relationship between life satisfaction, social interest and participation in extracurricular activities among adolescent students. The study revealed that higher social interest was significantly related to higher levels of overall satisfaction, as well as satisfaction with friends and family. Adolescents who participated in greater numbers of structured extracurricular activities reported higher school satisfaction.

Another way of looking at participation would be doing something just for fun. It may be visiting the hospital, assisting in the soup kitchen, anything one does, not only for the welfare of others or for oneself, but also for fun.

Having fun with others contributes greatly to the growth of our social interest. There is magic in mingling with others. People can be frightening, especially when we meet strangers, but people are also important for our growth.

In summary, Adler identified four personality types: the ideal type, the getting type, the ruling type, and the avoiding type. The *ideal* (the useful personality) type includes those who have a high degree of social interest. The rest (the useless personality types) are destructive: the *getters* lean on others, the *rulers* seek to dominate others, and the *avoiders* move away from challenges.

In this section, these types were explored and it was revealed how these types can help us to understand the meaning of social interest. The useless personality types and their effect in our contemporary society were examined first. Three words: *prejudice*, *exaggerated autonomy*, and *poverty* were used as concepts that demonstrate the existence of useless personality types in our society. While *prejudice* was defined as an attitude toward others, formed without sufficient evidence, *exaggerated autonomy* was defined as independence without social interest. Finally, *poverty* was seen as deprivation due to lack of social interest. It was pointed out that the problem is not scarcity but that some people possess more than they need.

The useful personality type involved three characteristics, *win/win*, *intimacy* and *participation*. According to Covey (1990), “Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interaction.”⁶² *Intimacy* involves emotional sharing with others. Finally, *participation* was defined as interpersonal involvement that brings mutual influence and enjoyment among the members involved.

3.4 Summary

Chapter 3, entitled Social Way of Being, has explained the phenomenon of human society and how active participation in the society enhances *social interest*. The meaning of social interest has been established as signifying a social feeling that enables us to live with others in the society, and is necessary for our growth. This social feeling implies cooperation, responsibility, belonging, social cohesiveness and empathy. These concepts have been developed in all the sections of Chapter 3: *Definition of Social Interest*, *Social Interest and Common Sense*, and *Personality Types and Social Interest*. When social interest is damaged in one way or another, it leads to psychological dysfunction, hence it damages optimism; the main concept of the following chapter entitled The Spiritual Way of Being.

⁶² Covey, (1990), p. 57

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SPIRITUAL WAY OF BEING

“When people who were never particularly strong become strong in the face of adversity, when people who tended to think only of themselves become unselfish and heroic in an emergency, I have to ask myself where they got these qualities which they would freely admit they did not have before. My answer is that this is one of the ways in which God helps us when we suffer beyond the limits of our own strength”.

— Rabbi Kushner.

As physical strength, self-esteem and social interest are measures of physical, psychological and social ways of being respectively, optimism is a measure of the spiritual way of being. A person is said to be spiritually healthy depending on the degree of optimism he or she possesses. In other words, a person is spiritually healthy when he or she has hope about the future. Optimism and hope are used interchangeably.

This chapter will reveal that optimism includes experiential and spiritual aspects. The latter will be more emphasized because I believe that true optimism is rooted in spirituality as will be explained later in the chapter. True positive attitude that comes from experience involves having a favourable outlook and seeking for the highest good in all things. Dr. Victor Frankl (1984) gives us more insight into the understanding of hope. He states, “The consciousness of one’s inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by prison life. But how many free individuals, let alone prisoners, possess it?”⁶³

Charity can be lost by mortal sin, but nothing can extinguish hope. Like St. Paul puts it, hope will not disappoint us (Romans 5:5). Without hope, there is no religion because in hope a human spirit searches for the meaning of life. All religions point to searching for meaning in life. Optimism is not wishful thinking because wishful thinking about what we should be, without devoting ourselves by taking necessary steps and waiting patiently toward fulfilling our dreams is absurd.

⁶³ Dr Frankl, V, (1984) p. 72

4.1 Definition of Optimism

No one is immune to pain, and it shouldn't be denied when it exists. The key is to know that you can lead a productive and meaningful life no matter what the external circumstances are. What positive thinking does is offer a power boost to help you handle whatever life gives you. Your "bad breaks" do not dominate your life; your indomitable strength does. And when you feel that indomitable strength, you really can handle any of your fears from a position of power – the kind of power that can really make things happen.

– Susan Jeffers.

In this section, optimism is defined as *positive attitude* and as *hope*. While positive attitude explains the experiential dimension of optimism, hope reflects the spiritual aspect. Experiential in this case means what happens in life's events that instill confidence in a person. For example, a person who succeeds frequently in one area has a high probability of becoming optimistic in other areas of life. The spiritual dimension involves optimism due to a person's belief in the transcendent. For example, people who have faith in God, believing that God helps them in whatever they do, in general, are optimistic.

4.1.1 Positive Attitude

Life is a gift. It gives us a privilege, an opportunity and a responsibility to give something back by becoming more.

– Anthony Robins.

Positive attitude, the experiential dimension of optimism, involves a position we take after a favourable outcome from our experience. If we experience something pleasant, we tend to be optimistic, expecting the same outcome will happen again. Positive attitude declares, "All shall be well."

What is positive attitude? During crises, when we became gloomy, we often hear our friends encouraging us to have a positive attitude. The story below may sound familiar.

I remember a friend of mine telling me to have a positive attitude after I failed to secure an internship position. After that incident, I was hurting and feeling rejected. I had applied to 17 agencies for an internship position and I was sure one of them would take me. During one interview, I was told my résumé was "impressive" and that they needed a person like me to bring a difference to their agency. They praised my extensive experience as a priest and as a student of psychology. They gave me high hopes of being selected to join them. It came as a shock to learn that I was

not accepted to any agency. I felt my future was at stake because I had been given only one year by my superiors to finish my internship and then come back home. During that time, as I was hurting, my friends advised me to have a positive attitude, and "don't take it personally," they said. The fact is I took it personally.

By positive attitude, I don't mean insulating oneself from negative feelings. Pain is an inevitable and necessary part of life. Whether we like it or not, from time to time, we are going to be disappointed. We cannot be liked by everyone, we are not going to be the best as we would like or should be, we will be let down by the very people we trust, etc. All these are occasions for pain that may bring discouragement and other negative feelings. Positive attitude does not mean ignoring these occasions and pretending they don't exist. True positive attitude involves two dimensions: having a favourable outlook on life that desirable outcomes will be attained and seeking for the highest good in whatever happens in our life.

Whatever we imagine comes true, so be careful what you set your imagination on. If we keep our attention on negative outcomes, usually they happen.

Favourable Outlook: According to Hale, et al. (1992), optimism is a stable personality dimension, and it has been defined as a belief that desirable outcomes are attainable. Generally, optimists look favourably at life and expect good rather than bad things to happen to them (Scheier & Caver, 1985). There is a saying that "whatever we imagine comes true, so be careful what you set your imagination on." I presume we all have had an experience where our imagination somehow comes true. If we keep our attention on negative outcomes, usually they happen. My experience may clarify this point. Each time I am asked to give a presentation, if my first reaction is to doubt the possibility of success, the result usually is not what I desire. I start visualizing how I am going to sound awkward and terrible and how people are going to be bored by what I am going to say. I sometimes also start thinking the content of my talk may not make sense to my listeners, or start visualizing giving a terrible picture of myself to my audience (whose respect I value, and after the talk would no longer respect me), I start thinking that I should turn the invitation down, but sometimes it is not easy to turn it down. When I have these reactions I normally don't perform well. On the other hand, when I respond right away, consent to do it and immediately ask about the topic, I start to prepare myself by focusing on what I am going to say, instead of how I am going to say it, and then I remain confident until the day of delivery. I am convinced that in whatever we undertake, desirable outcomes are normally attainable, if we

believe they are. Having a favourable outlook excites a person to prepare for the task ahead, knowing that if he or she prepares well by doing all the necessary work and focusing on what is supposed to be done, a desirable outcome happens. On the other hand, if a person focuses on undesirable outcomes, he or she will keep postponing things, failing to acquire the necessary skills for future performances. Not preparing for the task ahead causes nervousness and the expected poor outcome. An optimistic person expects to succeed.

An optimistic person not only expects to succeed, but also knows that whatever the outcome, it will be for the greater good.

Highest good: Optimism is also defined as “a positive attitude that everything happens for the best” (Corsini, 1999). An optimistic person not only expects to succeed, but also knows that whatever the outcome, it will be for the highest good. Looking retrospectively at my experience of feeling rejected when I was searching for an internship position, I think it, was good for me. Prior to that, I had not had an experience of looking for a job and feeling the rejection. A similar scenario occurred as I was looking for a place to do a post-doctorate program. I didn’t get any positions and this time I did not feel the same hurt. I was disappointed but not hurt. I am now comfortable in the real world; it is a loving world, but also sometimes a world where we experience rejection. Seeking to be loved all the time by all people in all places is looking for disappointment. We have to be comfortable in this world with its consolations and desolations.

Therefore, a positive attitude is a disposition whereby an individual believes, having fulfilled all necessary conditions, that the desirable outcome is attainable and trusting that this outcome, in one way or another, will be for one’s highest good. Studies have revealed optimism as being positively correlated with a higher level of self-esteem and other aspects of psychological health. (Fischer & Leitenberg, 1986; Mearn, 1989) Optimism is negatively correlated with neuroticism (Smith, et al., 1989) and lower levels of depression (Fibel & Hale, 1978). It has also been reported that there is a relationship between optimism and physical health (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

4.1.2 Hope

The consciousness of one’s inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual thing, and cannot be shaken by prison life. But how many free individuals, let alone prisoners, possess it?

– Victor Frankl.

Hope is another dimension of optimism that carries a spiritual aspect. A person is optimistic because he or she believes in the higher power that orders all things. Trusting in the higher power brings confidence and hope. The notion of hope has been extensively discussed by several religious beliefs, which can give us more insight into the meaning of optimism. In this section, hope and optimism will be discussed from my own religious background (Christianity) in which I trust others from different beliefs, or even those believing in nothing, will find some common ground. Two notions are used in describing hope: *God is the foundation of hope*, and *called to hope*.

Charity can be lost by mortal sin, but nothing can extinguish hope. In hope all are called to go before God with expectations, even though they are aware of their unworthiness because of their sins. Hope does not disappoint us.

God is the foundation of hope: Optimism, defined above as a positive attitude, in Christian terms, is known as “hope.” According to St. Paul (1 Corinthians 13:13), hope is one of the three theological virtues: faith, hope and love, and “in hope we are saved”. (Romans 8:24) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines hope as “the desire and search for a future good, difficult but not impossible of attainment”. (Cross & Livingstone, 1990) The dictionary goes on to stress that hope is a primary end and motive of a Christian virtue and its author is God himself. According to the dictionary, Charity can be lost by mortal sin, but nothing can extinguish hope. St. Paul puts it beautifully, “Hope does not disappoint us.” (Romans 5:5) In hope, all are called to go before God with expectations, even though they are aware of their unworthiness because of their sins.

Scanlon (1989) insists that without hope, there is no human will to live. “In this basic sense, hope is a wager that there is some correspondence between this human will to live and the world which supports and sustains life.”⁶⁴ Scanlon argues that the will to live presupposes that life is somehow worthwhile despite all the evidence to the contrary. He adds that without hope there is no religion, because, in hope, a human spirit searches for the meaning of life. Therefore, hope is at the heart of our spirituality, as “spirituality is about one’s search for meaning and belonging and the core values that influence one’s behaviour”.⁶⁵ Therefore, as spiritual beings, we are called to hope. In other words, hope should be the driving force in our spiritual life.

⁶⁴ Scanlon, (1989), p. 493

⁶⁵ Sperry, (2001), p. 4

Wishful thinking about what we should be without devoting ourselves by taking necessary steps and waiting patiently toward fulfilling our dreams is absurd.

Called to hope: In *Reaching Out*, Nouwen (1975) discusses the three movements of the spiritual life: the first is the movement from loneliness to solitude, which leads to the second movement from hostility to hospitality, which leads eventually to the third movement from illusion to prayer. Reading Nouwen's movements gave insights into how these movements can lead to the characteristics of optimism as defined above. To borrow Nouwen's terms, optimistic individuals can be defined as those who are also ahead in the three movements. In the first movement, optimists can live in solitude without a disturbing amount of loneliness; in the second movement, they are hospitable people; and, in the third movement, they have some significant relationship with God.

Human beings struggle between: loneliness (left pole) and solitude (right pole); hostility (left pole) and hospitality (right pole); and illusion (left pole) and prayer (right pole). Most "normal" people are found somewhere in the middle of these poles. Our world is not divided between those who are on one pole as opposed to another pole. We frequently fluctuate between these poles. It can be tempting to take shortcuts on the continuum of these poles, especially when we find ourselves at the more extreme left of the poles because of the pain that is involved with being there. Life requires that we accept our position on the poles and hope that by doing the necessary work, while waiting patiently, we can move toward the right pole. In the last chapter of Part 11, a detailed account of the practices that should be adopted for an individual to move toward the right poles in the spiritual movements will be presented.

Wishful thinking about what we should be, without devoting ourselves to taking necessary steps and waiting patiently toward fulfilling our dreams is absurd. Nouwen speaks strongly against this attitude, saying, "We are in danger of becoming unhappy people suffering from many unsatisfied cravings and tortured by desires and expectations that never can be fulfilled."⁶⁶ As human beings we have many desires, some of which have disappointed us because they were not fulfilled. The psalmist gives more insight into the meaning of hoping in God:

The Lord upholds all who are falling and rises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is just in all his ways and kind in all his doings. The Lord is

⁶⁶ Nouwen, (1975), p. 28

near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth (Psalm 146:14–18).

In this section optimism has been defined as the measurement of the Spiritual Way of Being. The following two dimensions of optimism have also been presented: *positive attitude* and *hope*. Whereas positive attitude emerges from life experiences, hope is the product of the person's faith in the higher power. In the following section, discussion of the three movements of spiritual life, introduced briefly above will be continued. Nouwen's way of describing the movements of spiritual life gives excellent insights into what can be considered to be true optimism.

4.2 Spiritual Movements

Are you aware that everything on earth moves around the sun? Yes, the earth moves around the sun, and so all in it. The act of moving along the sun brings life. There is magic in the movement. When a person stops moving, the grave is the only place. He or she is good for nothing - is dead. Yes, movement is magic, the more we move, the more we grow. Everything moves. So move, move, move and move until there is no space to move to. This section is about three very important movements – the movements into meaning and life.

In this section, the three movements of spiritual life of Nouwen (1975), which were discussed briefly in the preceding section, are revisited. For Nouwen, moving from loneliness to solitude leads to moving from hostility to hospitality, which eventually leads to advancing from illusion to prayer. These movements are used to give more insight into the meaning of optimism. An optimistic person's main characteristics include feeling at peace in solitude, hospitality and having a significant relationship with God that is not based on illusions.

4.2.1 Solitude

Often people attempt to live their lives backward: they try to have more things, or more money, in order to do more of what they want so that they will be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are; then do what you need to do, in order to have what you want.

– Sarah Ban Breathnach

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Cowie, 1989) defines loneliness as sadness due to lack of friends or companions and solitude as a

“state of being alone without companions.” The dictionary definition of loneliness does not apply in this section. Solitude is explained in three ways: as *facing our humanity*, as *a quiet inner centre* and as *nakedness*. It can be argued that a person who acquires these qualities can easily become optimistic.

We should be learning to weep, learning to keep vigil, learning to wait for the dawn. Perhaps this is what it means to be human.

Facing our humanity: Loneliness is that painful experience, which most of us suffer from time to time. We all have had experiences, for example, when we didn't succeed in some projects we undertook. Other examples include feeling rejected, living far from home and feeling homesick, failing at school and feeling it was the end of everything and also feeling that we are not receiving enough love from the people who claim they love us. Experiences like these can be occasions leading to feelings of loneliness. Loneliness happens when we feel as if life has no meaning. It is “that strange inner gnawing, that mental hunger, that unsettling unrest that makes us say, ‘I feel lonely’”.⁶⁷ Loneliness brings pain. Certainly, any human being needs to deal with loneliness that comes from the consequences of his or her choices without looking for shortcuts to avoid pain. Nouwen stated that we should be “learning to weep, learning to keep vigil, learning to wait for the dawn. Perhaps this is what it means to be human”.⁶⁸ He added, “We constantly find ourselves clinging to people, books, events, experiences, projects and plans, secretly hoping that this time it will be different.”⁶⁹ Facing our humanity with courage and hope is one of the ways of living in solitude.

A man or woman who has developed this solitude of heart is no longer pulled apart by the most divergent stimuli of the surrounding world but is able to perceive and understand this world from a quiet inner centre.

A quiet inner centre: Solitude comes from the Latin word *solus*, signifying alone. Solitude in this section refers to what Nouwen called, “the solitude of heart.”

“It is an inner quality or attitude that does not depend on physical isolation . . . A man or woman who has developed this solitude of heart is no longer pulled apart by the most divergent stimuli of the surrounding

⁶⁷ Nouwen, (1975), p. 24

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 36

⁶⁹ Ibid

*world but is able to perceive and understand this world from a quiet inner centre*⁷⁰

The movement from loneliness to solitude is the movement from restlessness to calm and peace, which has nothing to do with absence or presence of people. It is about an inner state of being, and, as pointed out earlier, we fluctuate between loneliness and solitude. I believe that we are all called to the ideals of solitude of heart. Therefore, it is important that we understand the difference between solitude and loneliness.

The problem emerges when one is disturbed with the pain that comes from one's loneliness. Accepting loneliness is part of one's growth which leads to solitude. In solitude, it is easy to be realistic without waiting for the dream world where all human suffering is turned into joy. It is in solitude that an individual can recognize that nothing can take away his or her deepest cravings for unity and wholeness. Without solitude, "our relationships with others easily becomes needy and greedy, sticky and clinging, dependent and sentimental, exploitative and parasitic, because without the solitude of heart we cannot experience others as different from ourselves but only as people who can be used for the fulfillment of our own, often hidden, needs."⁷¹

When we isolate ourselves from things and others and face ourselves as we were born, when we are able to say like Job, "Naked I came into this world and naked I shall leave," we enter the solitude. I am not my possessions and my possessions are not me.

Nakedness: In the last section, I indicated that optimism has two dimensions: positive attitudes and hope. Whereas positive attitude refers to the experiential dimension of optimism, hope includes the spiritual aspect. It is only in solitude that optimism is possible. A person who has somehow mastered the threats of loneliness can manage to have a positive attitude and is able to find meaning in life. Job clarifies the point. Before Job was able to face the loneliness of losing everything, he had cursed the day he was born.

Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man-child is conceived.' Let the day be darkness! May God above not seek it, or light shine on it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds settle upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it . . . Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Why were there not knees to receive me, or breasts for me to suck? Or why was I not like a stillborn child, like an infant that never sees the light? (Job 3).

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 38

⁷¹ Nouwen, (1975), p. 44

Job was in shock when faced with the reality of losing everything he had. In other words, he was in total loneliness and there was no sign of optimism. However, after reflecting on what these events meant for his life, Job was able to move from the state of loneliness to solitude. He was able to reflect back to the beginning of his life and embrace the reality that many of us find hard to face – the reality of our own nakedness. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). This is the total expression of solitude, when Job remembered that he came into this world naked without anything, and realized, at the end of it all, he would not take anything with him, not even his best friends. This realization is at the heart of being in solitude. T. S. Eliot explains this point very well in one of his poems,

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time⁷²

Life is about exploring, searching for the meaning of our being; the meaning that is found after discovering our nakedness, and realizing that we started this life on earth naked, and thus we are faced with the truth that nothing can make us happy, except our own nakedness when we come face to face with God.

The problem comes when we can’t differentiate ourselves from our possessions, when we are not able to say, “I am not my possessions and my possessions are not me.” After Job had realized that the best possession he had was himself, he became optimistic.

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42: 2–6).

As the tone above indicates, Job’s hope came back, and we are told, “The Lord restored the fortunes of Job . . . gave Job twice as he had before” (Job 42:7).

When we isolate ourselves from things and others and face ourselves as we were born, when we are able to say like Job, “Naked I came into this world

⁷² Elliot, TS, (1963), p. 28

and naked I shall leave,” we enter solitude. Of all the things and people I have, including myself, I am the only person I will remain with during my final departure from this life. Therefore, being in solitude requires that I face this person (myself) and we become best friends, because he is the only person who will remain faithful to me until the end when I meet God face to face. I should take care of him or her during every step of my life. When myself and I can move hand in hand, comfortable in being friends, we can never be lonely and we can achieve many things together. Unless that happens, optimism will be impossible. I can never be lonely because even when there is no person around me, I know I have myself and we have a chance of being optimistic. When I am comfortable with myself in solitude, I can courageously afford to embark on the second journey: from hostility to hospitality.

4.2.2 Hospitality

We are not simply machines trying to reach a destination. We are hearts and souls vibrantly connected to everyone and everything around us each moment every day!

— Susan Jeffers

Hospitality refers to relationships that emerge because a person has succeeded in integrating him or herself with reality, and bases his or her life in seeking the will of God. Therefore, as I describe hospitality, three concepts come into mind: *relationship*, *integration* and *seeking God's will*.

Hospitality is, fundamentally, a virtue that broadens our insight into our relationship to our fellow human beings.

Relationships: It is in solitude that an individual is able to discover his or her individuality, that is, is able to create what Nouwen calls an “empty space” between oneself, others, and God. Without this “empty space” one cannot move from hostility to hospitality. In solitude, it is easy to convert hostility into hospitality. Nouwen cautions us not to confuse hospitality with the “image of soft sweet kindness, tea parties, bland conversations and a general atmosphere of coziness”. For Nouwen, hospitality is, fundamentally, a virtue that broadens our insight into our relationship to our fellow human beings. We are all called to strengthen human relationships within ourselves, with nature, and with the higher power.

Sometimes our own loneliness may be so overwhelming that we go out to search for someone to take care of us or to take care of. About this, Nouwen gives us an invaluable lesson that “as long as our loneliness brings us together with the hope that together we no longer will be alone, we

castigate each other with our unfulfilled and unrealistic desires for oneness, inner tranquility and the uninterrupted experience of communion.”⁷³ It is at this point Nouwen advises us to take the difficult road of conversion that goes from loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality, and, as we shall see in the next section, from illusion to prayer.

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything.

Integration: In our hospitable role, we are called, to borrow the language of Estadt, et al. (1991), to be “pastoral counsellors.” That is, hospitality involves pastoring others with empathy. Estadt defined a pastoral counselor as “a religiously integrated person . . . who approaches others with a sense of mystery . . . along with an ability to enter into communion with others in a therapeutic alliance . . . with the goal of reconciliation and personal religious integration.”⁷⁴ As pastoral counsellors, we need the self-confidence that emerges from our faith in our higher power. To be effective pastoral counselors we need to be integrated; otherwise, how can we give what we don’t have? Like the Master advises,

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything . . . You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others (Matthew 5:13-16).

We are called to reach out to others with good news and speak boldly without embarrassment about what we “have heard and seen with our own eyes, watched and touched with our hands” (John 1:1). Before taking the “good news” to others, it has to be first “the good news” to us. “As long as we are lonely, we cannot be hospitable because as lonely people we cannot create a free space. Our own need to still our inner cravings of loneliness makes us cling to others instead of creating space for them.”⁷⁵

Have the “poverty of mind,” which demands “the continuing refusal to identify God with any concept, theory, document or event, thus preventing man or woman from becoming a fanatic sectarian or enthusiast, while allowing for an ongoing growth in gentleness and receptivity.

⁷³ Nouwen, (1975), p. 30

⁷⁴ Estadt et al p. 1

⁷⁵ Nouwen, (1975), p. 101

Seeking God's will: How in our virtue of being “pastoral counselors” do we become religiously integrated individuals? The learning to become spiritually mature is “an education not to master God but to be mastered by God”.⁷⁶ Spiritual maturity involves the knowledge that no matter what one knows about God, it is only a shadow of the truth of what God is. Nouwen advised us to have the “poverty of mind,” which demands “the continuing refusal to identify God with any concept, theory, document or event, thus preventing man or woman from becoming a fanatic sectarian or enthusiast, while allowing for an ongoing growth in gentleness and receptivity.”⁷⁷ Nouwen's views about theological schools can help our awareness as we strive to grow spiritually as well as to grow in the understanding of God.

Theological schools should evaluate themselves to see if they are providing a “free time” to future ministers. “The first task of any school should be to protect its privilege of offering free time . . . to understand ourselves and our world a little better.”⁷⁸ Nouwen further observed, “Instead of spending a number of free years searching for the value and meaning of our human existence with the help of others who expressed their own experiences in word and writing, most students are constantly trying to earn credits, degrees and awards, willing to sacrifice even their own growth.”⁷⁹ Do we spend a great deal of our time trying to earn credits and awards and in the process relinquish our growth and the growth of others?

A hospitable person is the one who has succeeded in creating free time and space for others where they can reflect on their meaning of life. Such a person can be optimistic, and can easily embark on the third and final movement of the spiritual journey, from illusion to prayer.

4.2.3 Prayer

Dear God, I trust that no matter what happens in my life, it is for my highest good. And no matter what happens in the lives of those I love, it is for their highest good. From all things that are put before us, we shall become stronger and more loving people. I am grateful for all the beauty and opportunity you put into my life. And all that I do, I shall seek to be a channel for your love.

— Susan Jeffers

I suppose that even those who don't believe in God can agree that we are spiritual beings. By spiritual, I mean the part in us that is capable of

⁷⁶ Nouwen, (1975), p. 104

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 105

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 29

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 85

self-esteem, social interest and optimism. Don't the "unbelievers" have a sense of caring for the welfare of others? I have come across people who deny God exists, but who have an incredible sense of caring for others, even more than some of us who profess the existence of God. Even the Master cautions that in the end we will not be judged by whether we professed the presence of God or not, but "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:35–36).

The spirit is the part in us that seeks to fulfill the principles that govern human life. As we saw earlier, these principles govern regardless of belief, race, culture, etc. They include: fairness, integrity, honesty, human dignity, service, excellence, and growth (Covey 1990). These principles are laws of human living, and when we do our part by obeying and acting on them, we trust that the universe will do its part.

Prayer is any action on our part that puts us in touch with the power of the universe. In this section, three dimensions of prayer are proposed: *trust and gratitude*, *action*, and *recognizing illusions*. A person who is trusting and is full of gratitude, a person who also acts and recognizes his or her illusions as illusions, can be optimistic.

After doing our part in obeying the principles, we get on our knees in gratitude to the force of the universe acknowledging that all shall be well.

Trust and gratitude: As spiritual beings, we are destined to pray. Prayer is what takes us beyond our being to embrace the force of the universe (in my case, as a Christian, I call this force God as revealed by Jesus). I suggest that even those who don't believe in God pray! In prayer we get rid of all illusions that lead us to take shortcuts in life. After doing our part in obeying the principles, we get on our knees in gratitude to the force of the universe, acknowledging that all shall be well. I believe the best prayers of all are the prayers that involve gratitude and trust like the one made by Jeffers (1996, p. 181), and quoted at the beginning of this section.

In trusting, we are aware that everything that happens in our life is for our highest good. Therefore, we thank the God of the universe for all the circumstances in our life, both good and bad, as occasions for growth. In gratitude we thank the God of the universe for all the things we find on our mother earth: friends, air, water, significant others, knowledge, etc. Looking at my life retrospectively, I thank God not only for the good times, but also for all the crises and difficult times. I have become

stronger because of these times. One of these times I suppose was during my childhood.

I grew up in a family where my parents were struggling to make ends meet. My father had to work hard to put my five siblings and me in school. We all managed to complete at least form four level, which at that time was quite an achievement in Tanzania. My brother and I completed form six, and the other four completed form four. There were times when we were not sure of anything. I remember being scared for my brother who was attending a private secondary school. My father had told him that he might not find the money for him to continue with school. It turned out later that my father found the money and my brother finished school. I also remember going to school without shoes because my parents couldn't afford them. Looking back at these circumstances, I thank God for these experiences because they built in me a sense of contentment. I tend to be satisfied with what I have, and I am always grateful for everything I have. I have also developed a sense of being mindful of the poor. I like to help those in need whenever I can.

Trusting requires that we “create the open-ended space in which we stretch out our arms to our God, who transcends all our expectations, dreams and desires”.⁸⁰

The prayers of gratitude and trust are different from the illusion that our life will improve without getting our hands dirty.

Action: I once heard someone in a radio interview saying that he didn't believe in God and that religion was a distraction from life. This is not my experience. My Christian religion has taught me that if I want to live, I should enter fully into life. The Master's philosophy directs us, his followers, to get into life by putting into practice what he teaches. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ but you don't do what I say?” The prayers of gratitude and trust are different from the illusion that our life will improve without getting our hands dirty. According to Nouwen,

*The movement from illusion to prayer requires a gradual detachment from all false ties and an increasing surrender to him from whom all good things come. It takes courage to move away from the safe place into the unknown, even when we know that the safe place offers false safety, and the unknown promises us a saving intimacy with God.*⁸¹

⁸⁰ Nouwen, (1975), p. 130

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 149

There is no way faith can be a distraction from life. If we believe that God is the source of all that exists (I think anyone who claims to believe in God accepts this), then God is action, because nothing can come into being without some action taking place. Being made in the image and likeness of God, as we Christians believe, we must be men and women of action. Any religion that distracts its members from real life and leads them into a life of dreams and fantasy is not in the service of God. In prayer we are called to rid ourselves of illusions that prevent us from being the individuals we were meant to be. In prayer we are moved into the action of continuing the work of creating ourselves, others, and the world. This work never ends until we enter into total perfection when we meet God face to face.

We will probably never be fully free from illusions. But when we recognize our illusions as illusions, we will recognize the first outlines of prayer.

Recognizing illusions: Prayer also involves seeing ourselves as we are. It is recognizing that we cannot be like God, no matter how much we achieve. A story can clarify the point.

A priest went to visit a psychotherapist complaining that he was not able to put into practice what he preached to others. This disturbed him so much that he became depressed to the point of not performing his work of priesthood well. For example, he shared with the therapist how he spent time advising people on their sexual life, while he felt “rotten inside” because “I can’t control my sexual life.” The therapist advised him to continue giving advice, and at the same time, the therapist suggested, the priest accepts his helplessness over his inability to control his own sexual life. The priest was advised to accept that he was weak and that Christ came because there were sinners like him.

This therapist was very wise. Accepting our imperfections and that those imperfections will remain with us regardless of what we become or we think ourselves to be, is key to real optimism. Nouwen suggests, “we will probably never be fully free from illusions . . . But when we recognize our illusions as illusions, we will recognize the first outlines of prayer”.⁸²

Whether we pronounce our belief in God or not, I propose we all pray for the awareness of our illusions, because we all have them. When we rationalize certain behaviours, assuring ourselves that it is okay, while deep down in our gut we feel something, somehow is not okay, but we continue anyway, it eats at us and reduces our vitality. The story of King David (2 Samuel 11: 1–26) clarifies the point.

⁸² Nouwen, (1975), p. 130

One day King David saw Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathing on her rooftop. The King sent for her and they became intimate. Bathsheba conceived, and after telling him that she was pregnant, King David decided to cover it up by calling Uriah from the battle to sleep with his wife so that the child would appear to be Uriah's. But Uriah, being a committed soldier, refused because soldiers in the battle were not allowed to be intimate with their wives. Then the King had Uriah killed, and behaved as if nothing wrong had happened. He brought Bathsheba to his house and made her his wife. In spite of all the rationalizations, King David still felt something was wrong inside, as he testifies, "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." (Psalm 32:3–4).

Prayer helps us to recognize that when our life "is not marked by inner peace but rather by restlessness and anxiety, we must be careful. A quality of heart marked by anxiety is a red flag telling us something is amiss and should be checked out".⁸³

In this section, three movements of spiritual life of Nouwen (1975) were used to explain the journey that should be taken by anyone wanting to grow in optimism. The first movement entails conversion from loneliness to solitude. The following three notions were used to explain solitude: *facing our humanity*, *quiet inner centre* and *nakedness*.

According to Nouwen, the first movement leads to the second movement, from hostility to hospitality. The concepts of *relationships*, *integration* and *seeking the will of God* were used to bring about the understanding of hospitality. Nouwen also suggests that the second movement in turn leads to the third movement, from illusion to prayer. Prayer was defined as any action we perform that draws us closer to the power of the universe. The following three dimensions of prayer were proposed: *trust and gratitude*, *action*, and *recognizing illusions*.

As major characteristics of optimism, it was suggested, in the first movement, that an optimistic person, in solitude, is not disturbed by loneliness. In the second movement, an optimistic person becomes hospitable; and in the third movement, the optimistic person develops a relationship with the higher power. These are qualities for real optimism.

Any person who is not facing his or her humanness, or is not acting from the quiet inner centre and is not facing his or her nakedness, cannot claim to be really optimistic. Likewise, a person who is not making an effort to build relationships, or integrate different forces in his or her life, and who

⁸³ Wicks, (1992), p. 219

is not seeking the will of the higher power in his or her life, cannot claim to be a real optimist. Finally, a person who is not full of trust and gratitude, or who is not a man or woman of action, or who is not recognizing illusions as illusions, cannot claim to be a real optimist.

In the final section of this chapter, titled Therapeutic Alliance, the discussion on the movements of spiritual life emphasizing them as a spiritual journey leading to a therapeutic alliance; that is to say, leading to healing is continued.

4.3 Therapeutic Alliance

Who is a pastoral counsellor? It is interesting to me that my work with pastoral counselling students has led me to formulate that question, using the personal pronoun who. Who is the pastoral counsellor? This is a far more meaningful question for me than what is pastoral counselling? As I have attempted to capture my inner response in words, it has emerged to be something like this: A pastoral counsellor . . . is a religiously integrated person . . . who approaches others with a sense of mystery . . . along with an ability to enter into communion with others in a therapeutic alliance . . . with the goal of reconciliation and personal religious integration.

– Estadt

Estadt's definition of a pastoral counsellor has been borrowed to describe our role as hospitable people (movement from hostility to hospitality). In this section, I want to expand the idea of being called to pastor others. According to Estadt, we should be religiously integrated, approaching others with a sense of mystery, along with an ability to form relationships characterized by a therapeutic alliance. The movements of the spiritual life are the movements to form alliances that lead to the healing of oneself and others. Someone whose name I don't remember advised, "We shouldn't try to go to God alone, because God will ask us an embarrassing question: 'Where are your brothers and sisters?'" Two notions, *other oriented* and *remove our shoes*, are used to describe the therapeutic alliance with others as we move toward our spiritual fulfillment.

4.3.1 Other Oriented

The call to heal others is the call to step out and meet others, so that all of us can journey together toward our destination – God. The call to healing is the call to embrace others, with all their wounds, because in doing so we discover our wounds.

Therapeutic alliance is not self-centred but other centred. As someone mentioned above, God will ask us where our brothers and sisters are, if we go to him alone; in whatever we do we should be thinking about others. When we win they win, and when they win we win. The concepts *called to healing* and *empowerment*, are being used to explain further the notion, *other oriented*.

The best way to heal oneself is to participate in the healing process of others. The call to heal others is the call to step out and meet others, so that all of us can journey together toward our destination. – God.

Called to healing: It should be emphasized that the call to optimism is in fact the call to social interest, as we saw in the previous chapter. Social interest calls us to form therapeutic alliances with others. The story of Jean Vanier in Chapter 3 is the best example of how the therapeutic alliance is realized. Vanier's experience with handicapped people emphasizes that the best way to heal oneself is to participate in the healing process of others. Vanier reported that he became in touch with his own woundedness when he started living with the handicapped, discovering the need to heal himself. This awareness would not have been attained if Vanier had not stepped out to offer himself to those in need.

I echo Vanier's experience as I reflect on my own experience of working with clients in psychotherapy and as a hospital chaplain. Meeting clients and patients in the hospital provokes some deep thinking about my own life. My working with clients, for example, helps me realize that listening to people's stories creates an awareness of my own stories which somehow are out of my consciousness, or which I am not willing to look at. I have come to believe that we all suffer to some degree the symptoms that clients bring into therapy. When I share this belief, I always sense a sigh of relief from clients because they become aware of the fact that what they are experiencing is in fact a common human situation.

In one of the sessions with Ann (not her real name), who was experiencing panic attacks, especially when she met new people, she did not believe me when I shared with her that even I feel nervous when I am with people, especially when I meet them for the first time. My experience tells me that the difference between "normal" individuals and those who become clinically disturbed by their symptoms is a matter of degree. Those who are considered "normal" become aware of their symptoms but they don't allow them to dictate what should be done. Ann had developed a tendency to run away each time she sensed being panicky. When I met her for the first time, she was so scared of me that she requested we meet at another time. Later on, I explained to her that I, too, was anxious about meeting

her because she was new to me, but I was not thinking about running away. I had asked Ann to go to church and meet people hoping that in the process, the intensity of her symptoms may be decreased. She proposed that we work a little more on removing her symptoms before she goes in that direction. I did not think it would work that way.

Most people, if not all, feel uneasy about meeting others. I presume the difference is in the way we face our symptoms. The experience of Susan Jeffers (1987), in *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, clarifies the point. Jeffers says,

*As my confidence grew, I kept waiting for the fear to go away. Yet each time I ventured out into a new territory, I felt frightened and unsure of myself. "Well," I told myself, "just keep putting yourself out there. Eventually the fear will go away." It never did! One day a light bulb went off in my head as I suddenly realized the following truths: 1) fear will never go away as long as I continue to grow; 2) the only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it; 3) the only way to feel better about myself is to go out and do it; 4) not only am I going to experience fear whenever I am in unfamiliar territory, but so is everyone else; and 5) pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the underlying fear that comes from a feeling of helplessness.*⁸⁴

We should realize the truth that there are no people who have been blessed from their mothers' wombs and who don't suffer the uneasiness and anxieties of human living. The problem comes when we view this human condition as a problem to be avoided, instead of seeing it as a challenge to be accepted and faced.

I also gained a lot by working in the hospital as a chaplain. I met patients battling with terminal illnesses, and in the process discovering the meaning of their life. One of these was a 65-year-old lady, who was dying of cancer. Each time I visited her, she was full of smiles and she expressed that she was full of joy. She knew that she was not going to live for a long time because the cancer had already spread throughout her body. She died after two weeks in the hospital. During one of our conversations, I asked her why she was joyful all the time in spite of her illness. She responded that it was because she felt she missed nothing. She said her grandchildren, her career and friends made her thankful to God. She said the moment she was diagnosed with cancer she made a vow to be thankful for every minute of her life. My response was, "Wow!" Here was a woman who somehow was certain that in two months time she will die, and yet she was grateful and happy to be alive. What about myself? I feel I still have many years to

⁸⁴ Jeffers, S, (1987), p. 22

live, and yet I feel I don't have even a fraction of her joy. This example and some others have made me look at my life differently. This lady taught me that being grateful gives joy in life and nothing can take it away. As Beattie (1992) puts it,

*Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.*⁸⁵

The call to heal others is the call to step out and meet others so that all of us can journey together toward our destination – God. The call to healing is the call to embrace others, with all their wounds, because in doing so we discover our wounds. It is the first step to healing. People who isolate themselves without friends may find it hard to grow. We grow as we tell each other's story of our life. As we feel comfortable to find somebody and tell the whole story about our life, we discover inconsistencies; we discover our weaknesses and our inability to heal ourselves, like King David who cried to God when the prophet Nathan confronted him after he had moved in with Bathsheba:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Behold, you desire truth in the heart; Therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purify me from my sins and I will be clean; Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51)

In a therapeutic alliance, we must avoid the trap of a quick fix mentality; only in a patient waiting in expectation, can we slowly break away from our illusions.

Empowerment: Being in therapeutic alliance with others requires us to help those, as Nouwen (1975) puts it, “who tend to underestimate their own human potentials and quickly make referral to those who have titles, thereby leaving their own creative power unused.”⁸⁶ Helping professionals should not act as little gods by playing on the weakness of some individuals who run to them for answers. We should be aware that nobody has all the answers about anything. We are all mortals searching for the truth

⁸⁵ Beattie, (1992) p. 36

⁸⁶ Nouwen, (1975), p. 39

about ourselves, others, and God. Clients come to us because they feel stuck, and we can help them become aware of where they are in relation to where they would like to be. Therefore, together we can come up with the method of how to get there. During our first session, Tom (not his real name), who came complaining about depression, wanted me to discover what was wrong with him, and he wanted to have his depression disappear in three sessions.

In a therapeutic alliance, we must avoid the trap of a quick fix mentality, and instead lead our clients to understand that “only in a patient waiting in expectation can we slowly break away from our illusions.”⁸⁷ Nouwen suggested that our illusions prevent us from creating the “open-ended space in which we can stretch out our arms to our God, who transcends all our expectations, dreams and desires.”

4.3.2 *Removing our Shoes*

As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So he decided, “I must go over and look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned.” When the Lord saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!” He answered, “Here I am.” God said, “Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground”.

– Exodus 3: 2–5

The metaphor “removing our shoes” is being used to describe another important characteristic of a therapeutic alliance. Two concepts are used to describe this metaphor: *sense of mystery* and *image of God*.

Others are mysteries to be respected and we must remove our shoes when we approach them, if the truth that we are made in the image of God is to be taken seriously.

Sense of mystery: Forming a therapeutic alliance with others requires that we approach others “with a sense of mystery. Ministers, counsellors, chaplains, social workers and indeed anybody involved in a helping relationship, should not attend to clients with formulas of how clients should be, or with labels for their diagnosis as if they are those labels. Sometimes the language we use to describe people can be misleading. For example, instead of saying that an individual has a bipolar disorder we say he or she is bipolar. As Nouwen explained, “Healing means first of all allowing

⁸⁷ Nouwen, (1975) p. 129

strangers to become sensitive and obedient to their own stories. Healers, therefore, become students who want to learn and patients become teachers who want to teach”.⁸⁸ He further stated that:

*Our most important question as healers is not what to say or do, but how to develop enough inner space where the story can be received. ... We can enter into communication with the other only when our own life choices, attitudes and viewpoints offer the boundaries that challenge strangers to become aware of their own position and to explore it critically.*⁸⁹

Others are mysteries to be respected and we must remove our shoes when we approach them (if the truth that we are made in the image of God is to be taken seriously).

If we truly believe we are made in the image of God, we must develop a way of viewing ourselves that actually feeds this belief.

Image of God: As we saw in the previous section, in solitude, I can see myself as I am and others as they are. One cannot have the sense of mystery toward the other without distinguishing oneself from others. As Wicks (1992) reminds us, “If we truly believe we are made in the image of God, we must develop a way of viewing ourselves that actually feeds this belief.”⁹⁰ The main reason why we may not respect others is because we don’t respect ourselves. How many of us are proud of who we are? I am always amazed how I put myself down more than any one else has. We are our worst enemies. When people admire me or admire my achievement, my automatic instinct or response usually is: “Are you talking about me or another person?” During my graduation party, everyone at the party was dancing and happy in appreciation of what I had achieved, calling me “Doctor,” but I felt as if I did not deserve whatever was going on. The biblical teaching instructs us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. I think we should celebrate this truth in every day of our lives without waiting for “graduations.” It is only after we have celebrated this image in us that we can appreciate and nurture the same image in others; then true alliance is possible.

⁸⁸ Nouwen, (1975), p. 96

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 97

⁹⁰ Wicks, (1992), p. 79

4.4 Summary

Optimism has been defined as *positive attitude* and as *hope* which, respectively, are experiential and spiritual aspects of optimism. The main portion of this chapter has been spent discussing the spiritual aspect, in terms of the three movements of spiritual life of Nowen (1975), as movements that lead to true optimism. The first movement, from loneliness to solitude, leads to the second movement, from hostility to hospitality, which in turn leads to the third movement, from illusion to prayer. Finally, Chapter 4 was concluded by emphasizing that true optimism leads to therapeutic alliance. Basically, optimism is defined as an attitude of mind that everything in our life shall go well. In order for this not to be wishful thinking that may lead to disappointment, it has been suggested that optimism involves trusting in the Higher Power that directs all things. Therefore, optimism is faith in the Higher Power; the faith that we are convinced never let down those trusting in him/her/it, etc.

Chapters 2 to 4 of Part I are presentations of the meaning of self-esteem, social interest and optimism. The meaning provided remains very closely linked to the definitions given by Branden (1994) for self-esteem, Adlerians for social interest and Nouwen (1975) for optimism. Part II involves the synthesis of the relationship *between self-esteem, social interest, and optimism*, and how growth of the individual is fostered in that synthesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

INSTILLING GROWTH

Spiritual growth is slow. There are no quick fixes that I know of. There are quick and easy tools, but they are meant to be used for a lifetime. And there are sometimes amazing flashes of insight. But they usually are a result of years of unconscious or conscious seeking.

– Susan Jeffers

In the preceding chapters, self-esteem, social interest and optimism have been highlighted and defined. In this chapter, the detailed explanation of their relationship and how they can be used to bring about one's growth is in order. Firstly, the definitions given earlier by Branden (1994) for self-esteem, by Corsini (1999) for optimism and by Adler (1964) for social interest are revisited.

5.1 Positive Correlation

I know it is difficult to accept that you are the cause of the feelings that take away your joy in life. It is very upsetting when you begin to see yourself as your own worst enemy. On the other hand, this realization is your biggest blessing. If you know you can create your own misery, it stands to reason that you can also create your own joy.

– Susan Jeffers

As pointed out earlier, there are two components of self-esteem: *self-efficacy* and *self-respect*. While optimism involves a positive attitude and hope that one's goals will be achieved, social interest emphasizes cooperation, responsibility, belonging, social cohesiveness and empathy. The task of this section is to demonstrate how self-esteem, social interest and optimism are related as components of wholeness living.

My study of a relationship between self-esteem, social interest, and optimism in my dissertation (Balige, 2004) revealed a significant positive correlation suggesting that individuals with a higher level of self-esteem have a corresponding increase in social interest and optimism. Positive correlation does not imply a causal relationship, but it simply indicates that the presence of one component is always accompanied by the appearance

of another component. Therefore, the results of my study indicated that the presence of self-esteem in a person is always accompanied by social interest and optimism. In this section, The meaning of this will be fully described.

While *competence* elevates self-esteem, *cooperation* strengthens social interest and *hopefulness* increases optimism. My reasoning in this section is that a competent person will find it easier to cooperate with others and such a person will automatically be hopeful about the future. Therefore, my suggestion in the last section is that any psychotherapeutic process should assist clients in three areas: to increase their competence as they face the challenges of life; encourage them to engage in cooperation with others; and to assist them to look at life with a hopeful mind. In other words, psychotherapy assists clients to practice wholeness living.

Because they are capable of carrying out the tasks of life successfully, their self-esteem increases. Such people . . . easily see the reality of who they are.

Competence: Self-efficacy is a notion of competence. People who are competent in life have needed skills to fulfill the tasks of life. Because these people feel fulfilled and they are capable of carrying out the tasks of life successfully, their self-esteem increases. I am more convinced that many psychological illnesses are due to people feeling incompetent. Remembering my school days gives me confidence to conclude that successful people appear confident and they work hard. Looking back at my school years, I recall there was a difference in the level of confidence between students who did well in studies and those who did not do well (this is not a scientific study, but simply an observation). Students who did well in school were most frequently in the library studying while others spent most of their time “having fun” and didn’t study as they should. The successful students were also involved in other extracurricular activities such as attending different academic clubs in school. These students were also hard working in other areas such as sports. They built their competence and in return they appeared confident because they were sure of what they were doing. Practice brings confidence. On the other hand, students who did not study felt they had nothing to offer because they did not take the time to master the materials. Hence, they did not develop confidence. One who fears his or her ignorance to be discovered lacks confidence and so doesn’t come out and, in the process, one’s confidence is not developed.

This can be true in other areas of life. If we feel we are not competent in any area of life, we retreat into ourselves and we become scared of the world. It is important we discover one or two things we are good at and direct all our energy to build competence in those areas.

People who are competent respect themselves as they are without exaggerating or diminishing their self-worth (self-respect). They easily see the reality of who they are; that is, they do not pretend to be something other than themselves. They are proud of what they can achieve, but at the same time they do not hesitate to acknowledge their limitations.

People who respect themselves as they are become aware that they cannot make it alone in life. Competent people are able to look at their success and realize that they would not have made it if they had not received some assistance from others.

Cooperation: People who respect themselves as they are become aware of the limitations of their competence and discover that they cannot make it alone in life. Competent people are able to look at their success and realize that they would not have made it if they had not received some assistance from others. Competent people know that no one succeeds alone. To my knowledge, there is nowhere this is acknowledged more than during the Oscar Award ceremonies, where during their acceptance speech, Stars who win Oscars always attest that the success was not for one person alone. They always acknowledge a group of people behind that success. This is also true in other areas of life. If we want to succeed in anything, we better choose individuals to accompany us on the journey to success. One day, I heard the former United States of America president, Mr Bush, acknowledging that if it had not been for his wife, Laura, he would not have made it to where he was. He did not elaborate what she exactly did for him, but it can be agreed that nobody makes it in life alone. One can therefore not doubt the saying that, “Where there is a successful man, there also is a strong woman.”

Cooperation for successful individuals is very essential because, borrowing from Covey (1990), a “Win/Win” relationship works best for them.

Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions . . . Win/Win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive arena . . . Win/Win is a belief in the third alternative. It's not your way or my way; it's a better way, a higher way.⁹¹

As we try things and succeed, our self-esteem rises, and we can easily anticipate success (optimism). A person with these qualities and outlook can undoubtedly be engaged with others (social interest).

⁹¹ Covey, (1990), p. 204

Hopefulness: Competent individuals who work in cooperation with others do not get discouraged very easily. When they fail, they try again and again until they succeed. Therefore, they are hopeful about the future because they may have tried several times and succeeded. Discouragement is an enemy of growth. The journey to growth is full of ups and downs. This reminds me of the time when I finished my first draft of a book (Balige, 2005), and sent the manuscript to about five publishers. The first two told me that it was too short to be considered for publication, and the other three informed me that my work was “wonderful” but because they had received other “wonderful” works and they couldn’t take all of them, they wished me luck with other publishers. A small discouraging voice inside me was very happy reminding me, “I told you.” I felt discouraged, but I vowed not to listen to my small voice. I decided to take more time to expand my book. As I did so, the book looked much better, and I felt someone would accept it for publication. I became less and less discouraged. I thought that even if it took 20 years, it would be published one day. It did in one year.

As we try things and succeed, our self-esteem rises and we can easily anticipate success (optimism). A person with these qualities and outlook can undoubtedly be engaged with others (social interest). Therefore, self-esteem, social interest and optimism are inseparable, although, as I found out in my dissertation study, they can be affected differently by various factors (Balige, 2004).

The next will posit that self-esteem should be nurtured first; the point of argument being that when we have a sound mind, social interest and optimism can be easily affected. However, self-esteem and social interest without a sense of meaning in one’s life is an illusion. Spirituality gives meaning to one’s life. It can be argued that of the four ways of being, the spiritual way is the foundation to one’s life. Susan Jeffers (200) puts it very well, “If we don’t consciously and consistently focus on the spiritual part of ourselves, we will never experience the kind of joy, satisfaction and connectedness we are all seeking.”⁹² The relationship between self-esteem, social interest and optimism is measured by spirituality, i.e., how a person finds meaning in life. What is spirituality?

Spirituality is the human capacity to experience and relate to a dimension of power and meaning transcendent to the world of sensory reality.

Meaning of spirituality: Sperry (2001) defines spirituality as concerning “one’s search for meaning and belonging and the core values that influ-

⁹² Jeffers, S, (2000), p. 21

ence one's behavior".⁹³ Self-efficacy and self-respect, the two components of self-esteem, bring meaning into a person's life. It will be difficult for an incompetent person who does not respect him or herself to find meaning in life.

For Anderson (1985), spirituality is "the human capacity to experience and relate to a dimension of power and meaning transcendent to the world of sensory reality." A spiritual person has the capacity to transcend sensory reality and delve into the future with hope (Remember the meaning of optimism in Chapter 4). With faith, in oneself (self-esteem), in others (social interest), and in God, it may be easier for an optimistic person to believe like St. Paul does, that "Hope does not deceive."

Spirituality is the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.

Spirituality and religion: According to Schneiders (1986), spirituality is "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." There has been an effort to differentiate spirituality from religion. According to Sperry, there are significant differences between spirituality and religion. "Religion is born of awareness of the transcendent together with expression of that awareness in conceptual, cultural, and social form."⁹⁴ From Sperry's description, religion is a type of collective spirituality shared by a group of individuals with common beliefs (dogma) and communal ritual practices (liturgy), whereas spirituality involves "a direct, personal experience of the sacred unmediated by a particular belief system prescribed by dogma or by hierarchical structures of priests, ministers, rabbis, or gurus".⁹⁵

In my view, religion can be a good tool that brings meaning to a person's life as long as the common beliefs are personalized. Being a blind follower of religion without trying to interiorize the collective beliefs and practices, normally leads to fundamentalism and rigidity. Numerous religious groups suffer from the problem of rigidity where group members uncritically follow what they are taught by their "Gurus." Religion can significantly contribute to the growth of believers if the believers are challenged to personalize the belief systems they embrace.

⁹³ Sperry, (2001), p. 4

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 4

⁹⁵ Berenson, (1990), p. 59

We should not try to go to God alone, because God will ask us a very embarrassing question: "Where are your brothers and sisters?"

Spiritual or religious? Some people claim that they are "spiritual" but not "religious"; that is, they are not spiritual in the sense of belonging to an organized religion. These are honest individuals who find some established religious groups hindering them from attaining a personal experience with the higher power. While these individuals are the minority compared to those who are "religious," religious groups should check that their rules and laws are not hindering the spiritual growth of members. There is nothing wrong with being "religious." After all, no one can grow alone. As in other areas of life, such as in politics, people are easily successful when they team up with others who share similar views. Similarly, spiritual growth will be easily attained if we team up with people of comparable beliefs to ours. Therefore, it is not whether one is spiritual or religious, but spiritual maturity is strengthened when one is both spiritual and religious.

From our understanding of social interest, we learned that there is almost an inert tendency in us to tilt toward others for our growth and we succeed as we engage ourselves with others in society. It will be easier for us to grow spiritually if we participate with others. As one "Guru" advised, we should not try to go to God alone, because God will ask us a very embarrassing question: "Where are your brothers and sisters?" Therefore, I would challenge all those who declare they are "spiritual but not religious" to be aware that any growth, including spiritual growth, is facilitated when it involves others. As no one gets sick alone (as believers in social interest would tell us), no one is healed alone and it is also true that no one grows alone.

Clients come for therapy searching for not only healing for physical or emotional pain but also for a sense of wellness and wholeness.

Real spiritual growth: Real spiritual growth emerges from high self-esteem, high social interest and high optimism. In this sense, spirituality is the openness to the truth about the relationship with self, others and the higher power. Any religion without a component of helping its members to grow into the openness to the truth about the relationship with self, others and God, is not serving them. People are yearning for this truth. When we hear some people claim that they are spiritual but not religious, maybe it is time to examine our religious group affiliations and shake up the status quo and practices. These people may be rejecting some of the meaningless rules we find in most established religions that don't promote growth.

As Sperry (2001) observes, “As many people have become less ‘at home’ in the religious traditions that have previously provided them a source of spiritual power and influence, they have become increasingly spiritually homeless.” He adds that people nowadays “are searching for a sense of healing and spiritual direction from sources outside religious traditions.”⁹⁶

In the next section, it will be argued that any therapeutic intervention is an involvement to restore spiritual vitality. According to Steere (1997), clients come for therapy searching not only for healing for physical or emotional pain but also for a sense of wellness and wholeness. That is, they are seeking spiritual growth that brings meaning and a sense of inner satisfaction. Sperry also presented an interesting Gallup poll that revealed the kind of psychotherapy or counselling clients look for. In a poll of 1,000 people surveyed in 1992, about the context in which they would seek counselling or psychotherapy, 66% indicated they would seek counselling from a person who shares the same spiritual values. Eighty-one percent indicated they would prefer their own spiritual values be respected and become part of the counselling process.

In my clinical practice, clients always raised questions about faith and how God gave meaning to their life. In our group supervision and conferences during my internship training, I heard similar experiences from my colleagues that they were always bombarded with questions about God from their clients. It seems to me, whether we like it or not, whether we believe in God or not, as therapists, we should be prepared to discuss questions about God from our clients. Most of the time I have felt as a spiritual adviser to clients. The spiritual dimension of psychotherapy shouldn't be bypassed.

This, however, as Sperry points out, is hard to fulfill as much of our managed care focuses more on cure than healing. The last section will show the difference between cure and healing, but suffice to say that cure aims at alleviating symptoms whereas healing brings in the spiritual dimension that explores a person's search for meaning and belonging and the foundational values that influence the person's behaviour. Studies have revealed a positive correlation between higher levels of spirituality and higher levels of psychosocial functioning. They have also revealed a negative correlation between higher levels of spirituality and lower risk for disease, fewer medical and psychiatric problems (Koenig, 1999; Levin, 1994; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Worthington, et al. 1996). Some of these ideas will be revisited in the following section as steps to be taken in fostering spirituality are discussed.

⁹⁶ Sperry, (2001), p. 5

In this section, the relationship between self-esteem, social interest, optimism and how they are components of wholeness living have been explained. It was argued that *competence*, *cooperation* and *hopefulness* are key ingredients to bringing about the relationship between social interest and optimism. It was also argued that the relationship between self-esteem, social interest and optimism is measured by how a person finds meaning in life. Since spirituality involves meaning, therefore, it can be concluded that spirituality is foundational to a person's life. The following section deals with how these components are fostered and nurtured in the individual.

5.2 Fostering Growth

The damage done to us during our childhood cannot be undone, since we cannot change anything in our past. We can, however, change ourselves. We can repair ourselves and gain our lost integrity by choosing to look more closely at the knowledge that is stored inside our bodies and bringing this knowledge closer to our awareness. This path, although certainly not easy, is the only route by which we can at last leave behind the cruel, invisible prison of our childhood

— Alice Miller

In this final section, ways of fostering self-esteem, social interest and optimism are suggested. As mentioned earlier, my dissertation study did not prove a causal relationship between self-esteem, social interest and optimism, but it holds that the existence of one predicts the presence of the others. One cannot imagine an individual with high self-esteem without social interest and optimism, or an individual with high social interest without high self-esteem and optimism, or an individual with optimism without high self-esteem and high social interest. As Branden (1994) stated,

The level of our self-esteem has profound consequences for every aspect of our existence: how we operate in the workplace, how we deal with people [social interest], how high we are likely to rise, how much we are likely to achieve [optimism] . . . and what level of personal happiness we attain.⁹⁷

Reflecting on the relationship between self-esteem, social interest and optimism has helped me devise a formula to best help clients who come seeking mental health services. This section is about that formula. Firstly, an explanation of what one considers to be the foundation of therapy is

⁹⁷ Branden, (1994), p. 5

given, and then an explanation of how intervening at the self-esteem level eventually leads to promoting high social interest and optimism.

5.2.1 Spirituality as Foundation

Psychological observations of the prisoners have shown that only the individuals who allowed their inner hold on their moral and spiritual selves to subside eventually fell victim to the camp's degenerating influences.

– Victor Frankl

In explaining how spirituality is a foundation to all my interventions when working with clients, I use the concepts: cure and healing, psychology of use versus psychology of possession, spiritual dimension, and tree imagery.

A cure aims at getting rid of symptoms, whereas healing targets at restoring hope and peace in spite of the symptoms.

Cure and healing: Since my involvement in the helping profession, I have been looking for effective ways to help those seeking my help. During training as a counsellor and clinical psychologist, I did not have an opportunity to witness clients “graduating” from therapy because I worked at agencies that only admitted “chronic” clients who were made to believe that they would be with their illnesses for the rest of their life. Therefore, they were not seeking to envision themselves to live without depending on mental health institutions. They were all on disability and were not in a “mood” to lose the privilege of receiving a cheque every month without working for it (this is my interpretation).

Of course, I was not expecting them to get rid of all the symptoms, but I hoped healing could take place. There is a difference between “cure” and “healing.” A cure aims at getting rid of symptoms, whereas healing targets at restoring hope and peace, in spite of the symptoms. I tried to explain to clients that all their symptoms of depression, or bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia, etc., may not disappear, and that they may be on medication for the rest of their lives, but I challenged them to think how they could find peace and meaning for their life. This was always my goal for therapy which I invited clients to visualize.

In dealing with mental illnesses, what makes a difference is not the type and intensity of an illness, but the mental disposition one has in dealing with the illness.

Psychology of use versus psychology of possession: One good example of how one finds meaning in one's life in spite of symptoms is Dr. Frederic Freese. Despite being diagnosed with schizophrenia and having several admissions to psychiatric institutions, Dr. Freese obtained a doctorate in psychology and he spent time caring for persons with a disability similar to his own – schizophrenia. (Amador & Johnson, 2000) One may argue that not all patients with schizophrenia or similar impairment can become like Dr. Freese. Well, the point is that in dealing with mental illnesses, what makes a difference is not the type and intensity of an illness, but the mental disposition one has in dealing with the illness. Adlerian psychology, which distinguishes between “psychology of use and psychology of possession”, casts some light on this point (see also section 3 of Chapter 2).

The psychology of possession stresses what a person has, whereas the psychology of use emphasizes the usage of what one has. Adlerians believe in the psychology of use. Adler (1957) emphasized, “It is not what one has inherited that is important, but what one does with his inheritance.”⁹⁸ This can be witnessed in siblings raised under the same circumstances, but who grow up to be different individuals. Maniaci (1993) made a useful distinction that two individuals may have the same impairment but may not be equally disabled. The position they assume toward their circumstance can be a crucial determinant.

Many mental health institutions, unfortunately, apply the “psychology of possession” in that they pay more attention to alleviating the symptoms. Of course, there is always pressure from insurance companies to go for the quick fix and remove the symptoms because it costs less. I worked in a mental health institution where clients were made to believe that if they could just take a pill, all their problems could go away. And of course they had become dependent on pills, and they were somehow content with spending the rest of their life in mental institutions (this is my interpretation). I believe that if mental institutions and all helping professionals can aim at healing rather than just curing (see the distinction above), they will make progress in revolutionizing mental health services and make a difference in people's lives. I am not implying that people cannot be cured of mental illnesses but curing only can be less effective and frustrating because symptoms don't disappear as quickly as clients would like. I am against people using pills only, without some kind of interventions that helps to address the psycho-social dimension of their problems.

⁹⁸ Adler, (1957), p. 37

This core may or may not involve any formal affiliation with religious tradition, but it reflects the beliefs, effects and behaviours associated with the basic spiritual hunger or desire for self-transcendence that all individuals experience.

Spiritual dimension: Among the dimensions of human experience and growth, there is a belief that the spiritual dimension is foundational to all. (Sperry, 2001) Commenting on spirituality as a basis of all dimensions, Sperry observes, “This core may or may not involve any formal affiliation with religious tradition, but it reflects the beliefs, effects, and behaviours associated with the basic spiritual hunger or desire for self-transcendence that all individuals experience.”⁹⁹ My advocacy is that the spiritual dimension be emphasized when offering mental health services. As noted in the previous chapter, when people seek mental health help, most of them are searching for the meaning of life for themselves and for those around them. Confronted with mental illnesses many give up, and so in therapy they learn how to keep hoping in spite of their predicament. Encouragement is a key word when working with clients. “The encouraged person demonstrates faith in self and life . . . the encouraged person is usually willing to rely on self to meet the tasks of life and is willing to rely on self in assuming risk if one does not know the consequences or faces potentially negative consequences.”¹⁰⁰

Individuals, as spiritual beings, are called to be like trees. They need healthy roots, strong trunks and healthy branches if they are to grow and mature spiritually.

Tree imagery: In the framework of my way of understanding and of intervening, I view psychotherapy as a way of restoring the person’s wholeness by instilling its components, namely self-esteem, social interest and optimism. The image of a tree with its three main parts, the roots, the trunk and the branches will be used.

The roots are the source of life for the tree. Through roots, the tree draws minerals and water from the soil. If a tree’s roots are defective, the tree may die. A trunk sustains a tree and makes it stand out. The trunk also carries minerals and water from the roots to the branches where leaves and flowers are found. The food is manufactured in this part. Leaves and flowers also make a tree look beautiful. The branches reach out to the

⁹⁹ Sperry, (2001), p. 25

¹⁰⁰ Mosak & Maniaci, (1999), p. 148

world. It is through the branches that a tree shows its kindness to the world. For example, it offers a shade for passers-by, it shares its fruits for the hungry. The tree is never selfish. Anyone is allowed to rest under its shade or pick its fruits.

From nature we can learn many lessons about ourselves and about life. Individuals are called to be like trees. They need healthy roots, strong trunks and healthy branches if they are to grow and mature to become whole. A mentally ill person is like a defective tree. As a therapist, I look at this tree and ask myself what has gone wrong with it that needs some healing. As healthy roots are for the tree, high self-esteem should be for a whole healthy person; as a strong trunk is for the tree, optimism should be for a whole healthy person. As healthy branches are for the tree, social interest is for a whole healthy person. I found this conceptualization effective in working with clients in therapy.

As my dissertation study showed that the presence of either self-esteem, social interest or optimism predicts the presence of the others (Balige, 2004), therefore, intervention on restoring one of the components will eventually lead to the presence of the others. As the seed first produces roots before developing a trunk and later developing branches, during psychotherapy self-esteem issues are explored first, before optimism and social interest. Flexibility applies depending on each individual client. For some, exploring social interest issues or optimism may be appropriate. In principle, however, we begin with self-esteem. My argument is that it is imperative that a person's self-efficacy and self-respect issues be addressed first. A person with high self-esteem possesses enough life skills to enable him or her to deal with others. Without social skills, social interest becomes dented, and hope becomes an unattainable fantasy. Therefore, in psychotherapy, I choose to intervene first in restoring the self-esteem, hoping that if a person acquires high self-esteem, it will be easier for him or her to have high social interest and he or she becomes optimistic.

5.2.2 Self-Esteem

So many of our addictions come from our inability to reach deep inside our being where the source of our joy resides and bring this joy into the dance of our everyday lives. In desperation, we seek our temporary fixes anywhere we can find them, even if they result in our self-destruction.

— Susan Jeffers

As per Branden's definition, self-esteem is the disposition to experience oneself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as worthy

of happiness.¹⁰¹ Therefore, fostering self-esteem inevitably leads to raising social interest and optimism because when a person experiences himself or herself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life, and if he or she feels worthy of happiness, such a person will be optimistic about the future and be in a position to collaborate with others.

As was pointed out earlier, Branden believes that one cannot work on self-esteem directly, and thus he proposed some practices to raise the level of self-esteem. These practices include: *the practice of living consciously, the practice of self-acceptance, the practice of self-responsibility, the practice of self-assertiveness, the practice of living purposefully and the practice of personal integrity*. These practices have been proposed to clients in my clinical work and clients, who follow through these practices, have reported experiencing growth in their lives. To foster self-esteem, social interest and optimism is to create a climate that supports and reinforces the practices that enhance self-esteem. My version of Branden's practices includes: *awareness, acceptance, ownership, assertiveness, purpose and integrity*. In this section, these notions are explained as they are applied to promote self-esteem.

When we let our story out, we create in us an empty space necessary for growth to take place. If we are so ashamed of ourselves that we find it difficult to let out that shame, it eats us up in many ways – as anxiety, as depression, etc., depending on what is our weak point.

Awareness: The practice of living consciously means “to seek to be aware of everything that bears on our actions, purposes, values and goals – to the best of our ability, whatever that ability may be – and to behave in accordance with that which we see and know.”¹⁰² I start psychotherapy by establishing a therapeutic relationship with the client, which is vital for the client to feel safe to tell his or her whole story. The telling of the whole story is a necessary condition for the healing to take place. When we let our story out, we create in us an empty space necessary for growth to take place. If we are so ashamed of ourselves that we find it difficult to let out that shame, it eats us up in many ways – as anxiety, as depression, etc., depending on what is our weak point.

According to Dreikurs (1973), therapeutic relationship is more than establishing contact and rapport. He stresses that creating a therapeutic relationship involves alignment of goals. “When the goals and interests of the patient

101 Branden (1994) p. 27.

102 Branden (1994) p. 69.

and therapist clash, no satisfactory relationship can be established. Winning the patient's cooperation for the common task is a prerequisite for any therapy; maintaining it requires constant vigilance."¹⁰³ I agree with Dreikurs that resistance on the part of a client implies a discrepancy between the goals of the therapist and those of the patient. The main thing I do during the first stages of a therapy session is to ask a client what he or she expects from our encounter. My main goal is to accompany the client as he or she moves toward his or her goals.

The practice of living consciously involves an awareness of what is going on in the client's life. For awareness to take place, the client and the therapist have to engage in the client's exploration of his or her situation. This exploration has two objectives. First, the need to know the context in which the client operates his or her life. This involves first studying the client's past context of functioning which includes his or her formative years and, second, understanding his or her current field of operation which may explain the difficulties in the present functioning. In Adlerian terms, the past and present context of the client's field of operating is known as his or her *lifestyle*. Since my approach is Adlerian, I use the concept of *lifestyle* to understand a client's basic personality pattern which Adlerians believe develops in early childhood. I concur with Dreikurs (1973) that:

*It is impossible to understand any adult without information about his or her formative years, for that is when he or she developed his concept about him or herself and about life, concepts that are maintained throughout life, although he or she may remain completely unaware of the premises upon which he or she acts*¹⁰⁴

Therefore, as I explore the client's lifestyle, I establish the movement and purpose of the client's behaviour. In the Adlerian approach, we are less concerned by why a person behaves in a certain way, but we ask for what purpose a person behaves that way. For example, instead of asking why a person is depressed, we explore the purpose for the depression. In other words, a person must be "gaining" something from the depression. In order to help a person live consciously, "we confront him or her constantly with his or her movements, with intentions. We explain his or her private logic, which he cannot see for him or herself."¹⁰⁵ The practice of living consciously is the practice of making ourselves aware of the whole truth about us. Nothing should take us by surprise. When we are anxious, when we are depressed, when we are not giving our jobs our best, when we know that something somehow somewhere in our life is not right, then we should

¹⁰³ Dreikurs, (1973), p. 7

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 9

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 11

take some time to think about it. "If we do not bring an appropriate level of consciousness to our activities, if we do not live mindfully, the inevitable penalty is a diminished sense of self-efficacy and self-respect . . . Our mind is our basic tool of survival. Betray it and self-esteem suffers."¹⁰⁶

In order to instill awareness in a person, we do more than testing and giving a diagnosis to the person. Testing and diagnostic labels are important as long as they increase one's consciousness. Giving a client a diagnostic label for the sake of the third party reimbursement is counter-productive. I once worked in an agency in the U.S.A. where clients wanted the worst diagnostic label they could get in order to qualify for disability benefits. This is abuse of mental health services and it is unfortunately a widespread practice among mental health centers in the States. Diagnosis is the most important activity in the therapeutic process. Therapists must equip themselves to recognize the presentations of disorders. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM) can be a helpful tool in aiding the therapist to draw some conclusions about the client's problem presentations. Therefore, the knowledge of DSM is essential for anyone working in the mental health area. The bio-psycho-social approach of the DSM can be very helpful in understanding the whole person as he or she lives in the environment. However, care should be taken in the use of testing and DSM categories. If these lead to the categorization of individuals, we lose the ideographic uniqueness of the individuals. For example, individuals should not be referred to as being schizophrenic, depressed, etc., but we should say they have schizophrenia or have depression. I agree with the Adlerians that symptoms "provide clues to understanding with what lifestyle issues individuals are attempting to deal."¹⁰⁷ In diagnosis, we go beyond labeling a person and we look for what the client is saying about himself or herself; we look for his or her story behind these labels. We examine the client's movement in life. We attempt to understand people's goals and their movements toward them. The lifestyle is the attitudinal posture people take to life and represents the core of the personality." Two individuals with depression are not depressed in the same way. They may have different stories about how they got into a state of being depressed. Getting to the uniqueness of clients' stories is vital before making proper interventions.

I believe that the awareness is a precondition of all future work in the therapeutic process. Without being aware of what is going on, growth would be impossible because growth is about change and we cannot change what we do not know. Therefore, immediately after my first contact with a client,

¹⁰⁶ Branden, (1994), p. 68

¹⁰⁷ Mosak and Maniaci, (1999), p. 143

before anything else, we start a process of instilling awareness in terms of creating rapport, assessment and diagnosis.

Before we can change anything in our life, we have to recognize that this is the way it is meant to be right now. We think what we think, feel what we feel, desire what we desire, have done what we have done and are what we are. It is the refusal to regard any part of ourselves – our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts, our actions, our dreams as alien, as ‘not me.

Acceptance: *The practice of self-acceptance entails treating oneself with dignity. No growth or change will take place if there is self-rejection of the reality of what one is. It is impossible to change what one does not accept. Clients should be encouraged to accept their condition first before they try to change it.*

“An attitude of basic self-acceptance is what an effective psychotherapist strives to awaken in a person of even the lowest self-esteem. This attitude can inspire an individual to face whatever he or she most needs to encounter within without collapsing into self-hatred, repudiating the value of his or her person, or relinquishing the will to live. It entails the declaration: ‘I choose to value myself, to treat myself with respect, to stand up for my right to exist.’”¹⁰⁸

Acceptance does not signify liking. I can confront my undesired behaviour without disliking myself as a person. The importance of acceptance may sound overstated, but when acceptance is absent it denies us the very growth we desire. Sarah Breathnach (1995) viewed acceptance as “Surrendering to what is: our circumstances, our feelings, our problems, our financial status, our work, our health, our relationships with other people; the delay of our dreams.” She believes that “before we can change anything in our life we have to recognize that this is the way it is meant to be right now.”

Branden has put forward three levels of meaning of self-acceptance that, in my opinion, are central in the understanding of the practice of self-acceptance. First, he says, “To be self-accepting is to be on my own side.”¹⁰⁹ The most difficult task during psychotherapy, as I encountered it, is to convince the client to accept his or her condition. Some people identify themselves with their behaviour so much that they fail to dissociate themselves from their behaviour. It is important to distinguish ourselves from our habits; otherwise, it is hard to change those habits. I may have bad habits but it is crucial I understand that I am not those habits. Being on my own side

¹⁰⁸ Branden, (1994), p. 91

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 90

is simply acknowledging that somehow in my life I acquired bad habits, but I am not those habits. To borrow from the Christian tradition, we were created in the image and likeness of God. Since God is good, we, too, are good, and we should spend every minute of our existence celebrating this reality. It is this reality that should drive us to be on our own side, no matter what we have done.

The second level of self-acceptance comprises being willing to experience. At this level, without denial, “we think what we think, feel what we feel, desire what we desire, have done what we have done and are what we are. It is the refusal to regard any part of ourselves – our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts, our actions, our dreams as alien, as ‘not me’”¹¹⁰. It was not until I read the following sentences that I came to understand what Branden meant by “willing to experience.” He writes, “To accept is more than simply to acknowledge or to admit. It is to experience, stand in the presence of, contemplate the reality of, absorb into my consciousness. I need to open myself to and fully experience unwanted emotions, not just perfunctorily recognize them”¹¹¹ When we don’t shy away from our feelings or anything we don’t appreciate about ourselves, they stop having a grip on us. The only battle that we are assured to lose is when we pick a fight with our emotions. The second level of self-acceptance requires that we accept where we are. Without accepting where we are, it is impossible to establish how we got there and the course to take away from there. Accepting where we are is a necessary and an initial step for beginning to change.

The third level of self-acceptance embraces “the idea of compassion, of being a friend to me.”¹¹² Self-acceptance calls for an understanding, and not for a denial of what we have done. It is not about justifying any undesirable behaviour, but self-acceptance calls for recognizing the context in which we have done what we have done. That is what we do to our friends. When we encounter undesirable behaviour, as good and honest friends, we tell them that we are not condoning what they have done, but since we are their good friends, we tell them that we understand the context in which they were prompted to behave as such. We should encourage clients to be friends to themselves.

In the Adlerian context, insights from the lifestyle exploration can be a good tool in communicating this understanding. Through a person’s lifestyle we can predict current and future behaviour. Communicating insights from lifestyle assessment can be validating, in that it explains why a person behaves in a certain way.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 91

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 92

¹¹² Branden, (1994), p. 91

Events that happen in our life are a part of the limits imposed upon us by life, but we can choose to excel even within those limits.

Ownership: The practice of self-responsibility entails owning one's actions and behaviour. "To feel competent to live and worthy of happiness, I need to experience a sense of control over my existence. This requires that I be willing to take responsibility for my actions and the attainment of my goals"¹¹³ The practice of self-responsibility frees a person from being a victim to becoming in charge of his or her own life. One of the questions that clients hate to hear during therapy, after they have explained their problem, is "What are you going to do about it?"

Clients have to be in charge of their own life by establishing a plan of action for their own growth. As a therapist, I act as a catalyst in enabling the person to realize his or her own dreams. People are not the sum of past experiences and thus determined by those experiences. I worked with clients who were convinced that their predicament was due to what was done to them in the past and, so they hardly imagined an exit from their problems except to look for some magic from me. I remember one client was furious because I could not give answers to her questions (because I did not have answers).

While I believe that past experiences influence us, they don't determine everything about ourselves. Between determinism (a belief that there is a cause to our behaviour) and non-determinism (which assumes the position of no causal connection to our behaviour), there is a middle ground known as "soft determinism" (Mosak and Maniaci, 1999). Soft determinism emphasizes influences or probabilities, not causes or givens. The distinction between "freedom to choose" and "freedom of choice" made by Mosak and Maniaci can help us understand the concept of responsibility. Freedom to choose is not the same as freedom of choice. Life does impose certain limits and within those limits I am free to choose. Freedom of choice typically implies unlimited choice. That rarely exists. Nonetheless, we are always free to choose, at least how we feel about what is presented; in other words, our attitude.¹¹⁴

Events that happen in our life are a part of the limits imposed upon us by life, but we can choose to excel even within those limits. A person who was sexually abused as a child, for example, is free to choose what to do with that terrible event that happened to him or her. At the time of the abuse the person was helpless, and this may have caused him or her lot of damage

¹¹³ Branden, (1994), p. 105

¹¹⁴ Mosak & Maniaci, p. 19

on his or her personality, but he or she may choose to use this event in different ways.

Ownership invites people not to ignore what happened to them, or to minimize the effect of what happened, or to excuse the perpetrators, but to ask themselves what they should do now so that what happened does not continue limiting their capacity to function effectively in their daily life. Telling people that they have a choice does not mean blaming them, or calling them lazy. The fact is that people choose all the time. The choice may be destructive, but it is a choice.

For example, a person who is so depressed that he or she decides to commit suicide is making a choice. Within his or her ideographic condition that person is trying to solve the problem imposed by depression. In therapy we don't blame people, but we show them how their behaviour has been part of their trying to solve the problem.

People choose; they and they alone, are responsible for their choices. They may not be aware of making the choices or of the consequences of their choices and many of the implications that those choices entail, particularly the social implications, but they are responsible for them. Adlerians don't believe that the 'the devil made me do it'.¹¹⁵

Therefore, in asking clients to take responsibility we don't blame them but we educate them and show them that there is a healthy way to solving their problems.

To be committed to my right to exist entails that my ideas, my needs, and my wants are important; to think that one's life is in one's own hands is to subject it to change in the way one wants it to be; my life is mine and does not belong to others, and that it is not my obligation to meet someone else's expectations.

Assertiveness: The practice of self-assertiveness requires "honouring my wants, needs, and values, and seeking appropriate forms of their expression in reality."¹¹⁶ Self-assertiveness means courage to be oneself and to respect oneself in all human activities. Many of us suffer from a complex where we treat others as being more than we are. We admire others and somehow wish we could be like them. This somehow stifles our inner natural gifts. Any gift unrecognized cannot add to our growth. In describing what self-assertiveness is and is not, Branden gives four dimensions of

¹¹⁵ Mosak and Maniaci, (1999) p. 19

¹¹⁶ Branden, (1994), p. 118

self-assertiveness which, in my opinion, are excellent ways of understanding the art of self-assertiveness. First, he says, self-assertiveness is an act of choosing to see, to think, and to be aware. Because we choose to see, think and be aware, we can ask questions when we don't understand; we can challenge an authority when it is appropriate; we can think for ourselves and stand by what we think. Branden calls this the most basic level of self-assertion.

The second dimension of self-assertiveness is "to be committed to my right to exist."¹¹⁷ This is tied up with the practice of self-responsibility, where I reach a conclusion that my life is mine and does not belong to others, and that it is not my obligation to meet someone else's expectations. For many of the clients I have worked with, this was a frightening idea. Most of them were sensitive to others' opinion of them. To think that one's life is in one's own hands is to subject it to change in the way one wants it to be. To be committed to my right to exist entails that my ideas, my needs and my wants are important. That is why during the therapeutic process, the therapist should validate and acknowledge the client's needs and wants first before rushing into confronting them or replacing them. To be committed to my right to exist also involves acknowledging my gifts and achievements. It is to recognize that "The Kingdom of God is within me." Clients, and indeed all of us, have to learn to acknowledge in us and be grateful for what Sara Breathnach calls "simple abundance."

At the art of simple abundance is an authentic awakening, one that resonates within your soul: you already possess all you need to be genuinely happy. The way you reach that awareness is through an inner journey that brings about an emotional, psychological and spiritual transformation - Sara Breathnach (1995), Simple Abundance, a Daybook of Comfort and Joy, January 3.

When clients begin to appreciate and be grateful for what they have, it is easy for them to begin to see the bigger picture, the reality of their being, and come to acknowledge that whatever they are is all right. When we are in pain, we fail to see the bigger picture of our being. It is like when I had a terrible pain from my "wisdom teeth" which needed to be removed, all I was thinking of was my pain and how it will be terrible in the dentist's chair. It is the same with mental illnesses. Clients fail to see areas of life where they are good; instead, they pay too much attention to their illness. Part of a therapist's task is to help them focus on what is working in their lives.

¹¹⁷ Branden, p. 120

The third dimension of self-assertiveness is the right to be participants and not spectators in the game called life. The practice of self-assertiveness calls us to sell our ideas to others. As Branden (1994) advises:

*Self-assertiveness is required not merely to have a good idea, but also to develop it, fight for it, work to win supporters for it, do everything within one's power to see that it gets translated into reality. It is the lack of this practice that causes so many potential contributions to die before they are born.*¹¹⁸

I did not paraphrase the quotation above because it speaks to me personally, and importantly, I wanted to use Branden's exact words. When I had the idea about writing this book, I remember a voice from within me saying, "Don't even bother, nobody will read it." Many of us suffer from this plague. We don't trust our ideas and dreams, and we let them die, and so we lose a chance to give our contribution to the world. It is by both receiving and giving to the world that we grow. Like the Master said, "You don't light the lamp and put it under the bed" (Mark 4:21-25). Our lamp should be in the open to give light to others. In the same text the Master adds, "To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." My understanding of these words is that those who have ideas and dreams but don't act on them for fear that they will not make sense to others, those ideas and dreams will be taken away in the sense that they will die. As we give light to others, we receive more; we grow more. But if we isolate ourselves from others even what we have does not grow. To be self-assertive requires that we recognize ourselves as "we are okay" and are able to see our gifts; we know we can participate with others in changing the world. "Without self-assertiveness, we are spectators, not participants. Healthy self-esteem asks that we leap into the arena – that we be willing to get our hands dirty."¹¹⁹

The fourth dimension of self-assertiveness "entails the willingness to confront rather than evade the challenges of life and to strive for mastery."¹²⁰ To be a participant means that one lives with others in terms of giving and receiving from them. It was also revealed that we grow as we share and receive gifts from others. In order to be a participant, I need to be aware of my gifts, and be willing to share those gifts with others. This is how we relate with the world.

According to Adlerians, "people are tied to each other in their need to cooperate and build a community in which we can thrive and grow."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 122

¹¹⁹ Branden, (1994) p. 122

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Mosak & Maniaci, (1999), p. 99

Therefore, each human being has a right to participate. Anyone denied this right may get broken because no one can grow alone. That is why one of the main devastating characteristics of mental illnesses is that it prevents individuals from participating fully in the world. Adlerians have suggested six different tasks that are essential for the well-being of any person. They include: work, social relations, sex, self, spirituality, parenting and family (Mosak, 1977, Sweeney, 1998; Mosak and Maniaci, 1999). Experience indicates that when people evade these tasks, known in Adlerian terms as tasks of life, they are prone to mental illnesses.

During the initial interview, I assess clients so as to uncover their stand on these tasks. One way of increasing self-efficacy is to take on the life tasks. These are the ways people interact with the world. The *work* task does not only involve employment but also includes six subcategories: “occupational choice, occupational preparation, satisfaction, leadership, leisure, and socio-vocational issues.”¹²² The *social* task involves how we belong and how we interact with others. The *sexual* task entails sexual role definition, sexual role identification, sexual development and sexual behaviour. Under the *self* task, we have issues of survival, the body image, personal opinion and personal evaluation. The *spiritual* task includes a person’s relationship to the higher power, religion, relationship to the universe, metaphysical issues such as how a person views life and death and the person’s perception of the meaning of life. The *parenting and family* task relates to how we relate to our families, the decision to marry or remain single, etc.

As I work with clients in therapy, I don’t try to dig deeper and deeper to find the cause of their problems. We may not be sure what exactly causes problems. I use the life tasks to explore how clients are functioning. Life tasks are the points of contact between a person and the world. If a person avoids contacts with the world, he or she will stop growing. Life tasks are ways to growth because through them, we build our self-efficacy and competence.

To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction.

Purpose: The practice of living purposefully consists of formulating one’s goals and using one’s powers for the attainment of those goals. “We build our sense of fundamental efficacy through the mastery of particular forms

¹²² Ibid, p. 100

of efficacy related to the attainment of particular tasks.”¹²³ One common denominator that defined clients was that they all had no goals. They did not know what they would do the following week, month or year.

The practice of living purposefully does not only require us to have goals, but also to have a conscious belief that our goals will work. Without this conviction, we unconsciously sabotage our effort. Nobody puts it better than Branden, “To live purposefully is to use our powers for the attainment of goals we have selected . . . it is our goals that lead us forward, that call on the exercise of our faculties, that energize our existence.”¹²⁴ A person who practices living purposefully does not say “I will try” or “I hope it will work,” but he or she lives with conviction that it will work, and so he or she harnesses all the inner power to make sure it works. Branden cautions,

*To live without purpose is to live at the mercy of chance – the chance event, the chance phone call, and the chance encounter – because we have no standard by which to judge what is or is not worth doing. Outside forces bounce us along, like a cork floating on water, with no initiative of our own to set a specific course. Our orientation to life is reactive rather than proactive.*¹²⁵

We tend to act by being energized by our goals. Our goals make us move forward as we try to attain those goals. Life without goals is unproductive and not worth living for. I remember struggling with a client who had depression and who refused to come up with goals, objecting she will never attain those goals due to lack of energy. “How can a person have energy, if nothing motivates that person?” I asked her.

Covey (1990) proposes that one of the “seven habits of highly effective people” is to “begin with the end in mind.” He explains, “To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction.”¹²⁶ Goals motivate us. Goals that motivate us should be specific. A goal such as “I want to be good” will hardly be realized. Goals need to be: I will read a chapter every day; I will jog two miles every day; I want to be making a million dollars a year, etc. With such specificity, I am able to strategize and modify my tactics in case of new information.

¹²³ Branden, (1994), p. 131

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 130

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Covey, (1990), p. 99

When we betray our goals; when we betray our standards; when we betray our values; when we betray what we “preach,” we hurt our self-esteem.

Integrity: The practice of integrity involves integrating one’s ideas, convictions, standards, beliefs, behaviour and actions in general. “When our behavior is congruent with our professed values, when ideals and practice match, we have integrity.”¹²⁷ Living purposefully is insufficient if we have no integrity. We can set all the goals we want but if we betray those goals, we lower our self-esteem. We all have had the experience where we set New Year’s resolutions in January, and by February we break them all. I do this game all the time when I become so excited by a new year and come up with goals that I think will make me a “wonderful person” for the coming year. By January 15, I forget about them and slip back into my old habits and then I start feeling bad because I could not fulfill my resolutions. Without realizing it, I discover that years have passed by without attaining the dreams of what I thought I should be. Apparently, this is the tragedy of our human condition, where we live as if we are two individuals – the one who we think we should be (the ideal self), and the one who we are in reality (the real self). Normally, we become dissatisfied with the latter and we feel like as though there is nothing we can do to bring the two together.

The practice of personal integrity involves bringing together the ideal and the real selves. Life becomes so confusing when these two parts of our self are not reconciled. When we betray our goals; when we betray our standards, when we betray our values, when we betray what we “preach,” we hurt our self-esteem. On practicing personal integrity, Covey (1990) again advises us, “Integrity is fundamentally the value we place on ourselves. It is our ability to make and keep commitments to ourselves, to ‘walk our talk.’”¹²⁸

In practising personal integrity, however, Branden cautioned, “Before the issues of integrity can even be raised, we need principles of behaviour – moral convictions about what is and is not appropriate – judgments about the right and wrong action.”¹²⁹ What if our sense of ideal self is irrational? Normally, we get the picture of what we should be from society. We are greatly influenced by the society. If we happen to be in a dysfunctional society that puts unrealistic demands on us, we will suffer, having a wrong picture of what things should look like. We absorb standards and goals that violate our human nature and needs. For example, Branden (1994)

¹²⁷ Branden, (1994), p. 143

¹²⁸ Covey, (1990), p. 149

¹²⁹ Branden, (1994), p. 143

notes that “certain religious teachings implicitly or explicitly damn sex, damn pleasure, damn the body, damn ambition, damn material success, damn (for all practical purposes) the enjoyment of life on earth.”¹³⁰ In some religious communities, members are made to feel bad because they had enough to eat, had cars to use, and had decent houses to live in! Some religious sisters feel shame because of being sexually attracted to a handsome men. Some people live with a sense of hypocrisy because they set their standard far higher than what it should be. Sometimes we are taught by the society to feel horrible over reactions that are normal ways of responding to our environment. The practice of personal integrity requires that “once we see that living up to our standards appears to be leading us toward self-destruction, the time has come to question our standards rather than simply resigning ourselves to living without integrity.”¹³¹ This requires courage because what we have been taught to regard as good cannot be easily discarded, even though it may be destructive.

5.3 Summary

For more than six years now, I personally have been practicing Branden’s six pillars of self-esteem and they have proven to be helpful. I still have a very long way to go, but as I practice *living consciously*, *self-acceptance*, *self-responsibility*, *self-assertiveness*, *living purposefully* and *personal integrity*, I feel I am moving in the right direction towards growth. I have also proposed these practices to clients during psychotherapy, regardless of the type of disorder. Some clients reported some growth they claimed they had never felt before in working with other therapists, for most of them had been in therapy for many years before I met them.

Revisiting the image of a tree, as stated before, I am convinced that self-esteem is the root that gives life to the person. As a seed has to develop roots before it grows into a tree, self-esteem is a foundation of the other Wholeness Living components (optimism and social interest). Growth results from a firm growth in self-esteem. I will foster self-esteem, social interest and optimism by promoting Branden’s six pillars of self-esteem. In working with people, I will promote and create a climate that supports and reinforces the practices that enhance self-esteem.

A person with sound self-esteem can easily become optimistic and have social interest. Nobody should jump into the other components of wholeness (social interest and optimism) without first resolving the issues of self-esteem. There is no place where this is done like in religious practices.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 150

¹³¹ Branden, (1994), p. 150

Many of us jump into religious practices without dealing first with issues regarding our self-esteem and hoping God will do some miracles to heal us. There is no shortcut to spiritual growth. The three spiritual journeys (loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality, and illusion to prayer), as explained in this book, must be travelled first. How can we succeed in our spiritual journey if we have a baggage of self-esteem unresolved?

I believe that practising the “six pillars of self-esteem” can tremendously facilitate spiritual movements. I can’t imagine a tree with a healthy trunk or branches without healthy roots. Social interest (cooperation, responsibility, belonging and empathy), or optimism can be easily induced if one practices awareness, accepts oneself, asserts one’s needs, sets one’s goals and lives them out. I am not suggesting it should always be: self-esteem → social interest → optimism. Self-esteem, optimism and social interest can influence each other. A person can specifically work on the components of social interest (belonging, empathy, responsibility and cooperation) and become optimistic and have high self-esteem. Likewise, a person can work on the component of optimism (movements from illusion to prayer, hostility to hospitality and loneliness to solitude) and attain a high social interest and self-esteem. However, I believe that it is more practical and easier to begin with work on the six pillars of self-esteem than starting with the other two.

EPILOGUE

In this book, an argument has been put forward as to why we get mentally ill and a way out proposed. The main concern that is frequently voiced by clients is whether they will ever be “normal.” It has been argued in this book that low self-esteem, low social interest and low optimism are common elements in most mental disorders. Without high social interest, sound self-esteem, and optimism, it may be harder to find meaning in life. Therefore, it is a duty of all of us in the helping profession (therapists, teachers, psychologists, social workers, etc.) to aim at processes that promote self-esteem, social interest and optimism in the life of those we serve.

I have presented in this book what has become my passion since I started my studies of psychology – the human mind. I am convinced that we can use our mind to create a “hell” or a “heaven” for us. This book is about creating a “heaven.” “Heaven” can be defined as when our life is full of meaning and we are satisfied with ourselves. We need to be aware of the power that exists within us (the power that is responsible for self-esteem), in others (the power that is responsible for social interest) and in the Higher Power (the power that is responsible for optimism). When these powers exist in harmony, they promote growth. This growth brings hope about the future and hope brings vitality that makes us feel, no matter what happens in our life and in the lives of others, all shall be well. It is in this sense that self-esteem, social interest and optimism are considered to be components of wholeness. Spirituality has been defined as involving one’s search for meaning and belonging. One will attain this goal by working hard to raise one’s self-esteem, social interest and optimism. Hence, spirituality is the foundation of Wholeness Living. This is my core belief about our mind, and how we can restore its vitality which somehow gets corrupted somewhere in the line of our development, especially during our childhood.

As stated in the introduction, I am aware of my imperfections and the long way I still have to cover toward realizing what is written in this book. It was my mind creating a blue print toward my growth. I have had most of these ideas for a long time and I have dragged my feet in implementing them. I hope putting them down in writing will challenge me to live what I preach.

I dared to write this book because I strongly believe that the best way to heal myself is to reach out to others; the more we give, the more we receive.

Therefore, I wrote this book for those who live their life frightened about everything. With them, I want to end by sharing the words of Alice Miller. She writes:

*"The damage done to us during our childhood cannot be undone, since we cannot change anything in our past. We can repair ourselves and gain our lost integrity by choosing to look more closely at the knowledge that is stored inside our bodies and bringing this knowledge closer to our awareness. This path, although certainly not easy, is the only route by which we can at last leave behind the cruel, invisible prison of our childhood."*¹³²

Thank you for allowing me to share my ideas with you and may they provide for you the growth that I was dreaming of.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU ABUNDANTLY – KEEP GROWING AND GROWING AND GROWING, AND ABOVE ALL, NEVER FORGET THAT OUR MIND HAS THE POWER TO CREATE A "HEAVEN" OR A "HELL." WHOLENESS LIVING INVOLVES CREATING HEAVEN FOR OURSELVES.

¹³² (Alice Miller, 1997, p. 2)

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Wholeness Living is about recognizing the power that exists within us, in others and in the Higher Power. When these powers are in harmony we experience growth in the sense of physical health, high self-esteem, high social interest, and high optimism. Therefore, wholeness living is the openness to the truth about the relationship with the physical self, the psychological self, others and the Higher Power.

Based on years of clinical practice, academic research and personal investigation, Dr Bonaventura Balige's approach to leading a full, rich and happy life focuses on four main areas — the physical, the psychological, the social and the spiritual — any one or more of which can be at the root of our difficulties. In this book are lessons and heartfelt advice to help us address the issues interfering with our enjoyment of life. While it is true that life is often difficult, we have the tools to deal with any situation. Dr Balige shows us that every person has the power to create the wholeness that can see us through the storms of life.

Every person can find happiness by following the steps explaining what wholeness living entails.

Dr. Bonaventura Mutayoba Balige, SJ, Studied Philosophy and Theology in Kinshasa, Congo and Nairobi, Kenya, respectively. In 1997, he went to the USA to study Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Psychology. He holds a Masters degree in Pastoral Counseling from Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland, and has a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Adler School of Professional Psychology in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Balige's experience includes clinical work in different counseling centers in Maryland and Illinois, USA. Since returning home to Tanzania in 2006, he has been involved in counseling services, consultations, and teaching Psychology.